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By Robert J. Horton

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Prairie Pawn

By PETER HENRY MORLAND

Torridon's "medicine" is so good that under the name of White Thunder he is held in the Cheyenne camp and honored.

Ride North!

By JOHNSTON McCULLEY

The man sat in a dark corner, shadows played over the walls about him, and he knew that he made a poor target. Yet he was alert.

Brains and Bandits

By AUSTIN HALL

The sheriff was, as he said, no skim-milk critter himself, but his son was the cream of the pitcher.

Something for Plenty

By ROLAND KREBS

There wasn't anything that Nature's noblemen of the Far West liked better in the way of rifles than what they got.

Stories by

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Western Story Magazine

EVERY WEEK

Vol. LXXVIII June 9, 1928 No. 5

The Forgotten Hills~

By *Robert J. Horton*

Author of "The Maverick of Marble Range," etc.

CHAPTER I.

CODE OF THE EAST.

TWO thirty o'clock at the Rameses Night Club meant that the morning had just begun. Colored lights played upon white shirtfronts, bare shoulders, white tablecloths littered with glasses in which gleamed liquid rubies, beryl, topaz, the emerald of crème-de-menthe, and the soft, saffron glitter of champagne. The booming of drums, clash of cymbals, squawking of saxophones—jazz. Smoke pencils from three hundred cigarettes. A dancing team, scantily attired, winning yawns. A tumult of voices, laughter, hand-clapping, calls for waiters—bedlam. Dancing in a small island of space.

Roger Hartland looked out upon all this with a stupid, bored expression. He was drinking cocktails, and now, as he raised his glass, it slipped from his fingers and dropped on the table. He didn't bother to right it—merely held up a finger to a waiter. The signal was instantly answered. Hartland had a way of winning respect and service from waiters. And he was a good tipper.

He looked across at the woman who sat on the other side of his table. A brunette, tall, dark-eyed, with a certain mysterious beauty and an expression

usually unfathomable. None could have told her age. Even Hartland didn't know.

As the waiter left, Hartland waved an arm that took in the scene about them. "Sucker stuff," he said disgustedly. "And I'm the biggest sucker of them all."

"Why, you don't spend as much as any of the butter-and-egg men who come here," said the woman languidly.

"I don't mean that," said Hartland with a frown. "I mean I'm a sucker to come to this place at all. I'm a fool, Rose."

"You mean you're drunk," she returned, fitting a scented cigarette into a long ivory holder. "What kind of a mood are you in to-night, Roger? You know I'm the victim of them all."

He looked at her with new interest. "Yes, Rose, I guess that's so," he said slowly. "Well, you're a pretty good sport, and I'm willing to pay for it."

Rose Raymond arched her brows. "You consider me an employee, then?"

"Oh, don't talk drivel," he retorted irritably. "Don't you see that I'm sick of all this sort of thing? What do we get out of it?"

"Well," she answered with a wry smile, "you get a good souse out of it every night."

"That's just it!" exclaimed Hartland, slapping the table with the palm of his hand. "That's just what I get. My life at present is one round of night clubs. I end up at home with the sunrise, soused to the gills, as you say. Along about two o'clock, Fredericks comes in with whisky and absinthe. I have a bath and another bracer. A bit of breakfast and I'm off for cards at some fool club. The theater, maybe, supper, and—you know the rest. Every day the same. Now, isn't that a fine life?"

"It might be worse," Rose observed with a shrug.

"Yes—it would be worse working on the docks, I suppose," said Hartland moodily.

"Why don't you go into business?" Rose suggested, knowing full well the mockery of the idea.

"Business!" he snorted. "What business could *I* go into? Father left everything in stocks and bonds. I know of no business I control. And I wouldn't know where to start if I *had* one. Rose, I'm bored to death; I'm all fed up with life. It seems as though I've been everywhere, seen everything, done about everything I want to do."

"Well, why don't you——" She bit off her words. She had been about to ask him why he didn't get married. But that would be fatal for her. Hartland was her meal ticket.

But he anticipated what she had meant to say. "Get married?" he said with a cynical ring to his voice. "And where would I find the woman? I believe most of them can be bought. The ones that can't are undesirable, married, or not in my set. I'm fed up on the woman question, too."

"Well, you're in bad shape, Roger," Rose commented. "Why don't you get yourself a fine big boat and jump off in the middle of the ocean?"

"Why the middle?" He smiled grimly. "Sandy Hook would do, and it wouldn't be so expensive. No, none of that, Rose. *You* may do it some day, though."

He looked at her and was startled to see that her face had gone deathly white. "Oh, I didn't mean it, Rose," he said hastily. "Come, don't look at me that way. Let's order champagne."

"What you say might come true, Roger," she said in a low voice. Then with more spirit: "Roger, it's spring. Paris is wonderful in spring, as you know. Let's take a trip over to Paris." She gazed at him out of shrewd eyes.

"Not me," he laughed. "But I'll stand the gaff if *you* want to go."

"I may take you up," she said. Roger was a good sport.

He was looking about and frowning again. A waiter passed and accidentally tipped a silver tray. Several bills fluttered down on Roger's table. The waiter gathered them up with profuse apologies.

"There it is again," said Hartland. "Money! 'Get the money any way you can!' That's the code here."

"Well, you should worry," said Rose sarcastically. "You've got plenty of it."

The waiter served champagne.

"If there was only something new," Hartland complained.

"There's a new revue up at the Cortez they say is very good," said Rose.

"Oh, what do I care for a new revue! If I could only get into a fight, or something! If I had the slightest fancy for it, I'd go big-game hunting in Africa."

Rose laughed softly. "Your moods change with the drinks," she said, and asked him to dance.

At dawn they left the club. As Hartland's car pulled up, a laborer on the way to his work passed so close in front of them that he jostled Rose.

"What're you doing!" Hartland snapped. He took the man by the arm and jerked him around with such force that his lunch pail was knocked from his hand.

The man pulled free and struck Hartland in the face. Next instant Hartland's right flashed, and the blow caught the man flush on the jaw. He went down in a heap.

A policeman came on the run.

"Don' get 'cited, officer," said Hartland unsteadily. "Man jostled the—lady, here." He was groping for a card; found it, and handed it over.

The policeman looked at the name and address. "Well, you better get along home," he said, and went on down the street.

Hartland took a bill from a pocket and gave it to the man, who was recovering his lunch pail. Then he handed Rose into the car.

Fredericks, Hartland's man, let them into the apartment, looking with surprise and haughtiness at Rose.

Hartland led the way into his sitting room. "Whisky an' soda, Fredericks," he called back.

Rose Raymond stared in wonder at the luxury surrounding her. Rare paintings and etchings, tapestries, bronzes, knickknacks picked up in many lands, soft divans, deep rugs, antique furniture, weapons, a gold-figured Japanese screen.

Hartland was lighting a cigarette. "Sit down, Rose," he said. And when the drinks had been served: "Rose, I brought you up here to-night for a certain reason." He paused. He was drunk, yet his mind seemed clear—if such a thing could be possible—and his articulation was slow but perfect.

She eyed him askance.

"Rose," he said, "without meaning to offend you in any way, you are a woman of the world. You have been somewhat of a comfort to me because I have been able to take my—my spite, you might say, out on you. But you've got brains. Now I want you to try and think up something I can do to break this fearful monotony that is eating me alive. But *remember*"—he held up a wavering warning finger—"it must be original."

Behind the curtains the man Fredericks was listening intently.

"Is that all?" asked Rose, rather astonished.

"That's the order," Hartland replied.

"And it's a big order," said Rose with spirit. "But I'll try it. And—there might be some expense attached to my investigations and researches."

Hartland tossed her a roll of bills. "Good night, Rose," he said drowsily.

Fredericks showed her out, and she

looked at him twice because of the curious expression he wore.

Then Fredericks proceeded to put his master to bed.

CHAPTER II.

THE END OF THE WORLD.

AT the breakfast table in the morning—or what Hartland called the morning but which was really early afternoon—Hartland sat frowning at his soft-boiled egg, bit of toast, and coffee, and looked at Fredericks suspiciously.

"Fredericks," he said sharply, "those drinks you served me this morning seem to be taking unusual effect."

"In what way, sir?" Fredericks inquired solicitously.

"Why, they seem powerful strong in one way, and in another they appear to give me a somnolent feeling," Hartland complained. "I feel more like sleeping than like eating."

Fredericks, being an English butler, coughed discreetly behind his hand. "If you will permit me, sir," he said solemnly, "perhaps it is—ah—if you'll excuse me, you were quite touched last night."

"I see," said Hartland with a glare. "You mean I'm nursing a holdover, and that those two drinks floored me."

"I wouldn't quite say that, sir," said Fredericks; "they were of the usual strength."

Hartland drank the coffee, ignored the egg and toast, and went into his living room to lie down. He was soon asleep. Fredericks told several who telephoned that Hartland was out. Later he went out himself. He went first to a doctor and next to a drug store. When he returned Hartland still was asleep.

Fredericks liked Hartland. He had worked for his father for twenty-two years; in fact, it was the elder Hartland who had brought him over from England. He had worried about the young man's present mode of living for some time; had endeavored to formulate a plan by which he could help him, but had failed. Subtle hints had merely brought scowls from Roger.

It was the visit of Rose Raymond the night before that had given him a sudden and great inspiration. He now had his plan. Roger wanted "something new;" very well, he would give it to him. He had seen the young man toss Rose the roll of bills and had muttered "gold digger" to himself. Which explained the look Rose had thought was curious, but which really was one of contempt.

When Hartland awakened, he called: "Fredericks, I feel groggy. Bring me a drink."

"Quite right, sir," and Fredericks did as he had been ordered.

"I'm late for the club," Hartland grumbled, looking at his watch. It was a quarter to five. He dressed hurriedly and took himself off.

As soon as he had left, Fredericks became active. He packed a trunk, putting in all his master's sporting togs, and prepared for shipment a rifle and shotgun, and other outdoor paraphernalia. He had these taken to the express office to await instructions for forwarding as addressed. He then packed another trunk with clothing, and this he sent to a railway terminal to be checked.

After this he packed a bag containing Hartland's shaving kit, toilet articles, and such things as he would require on a train journey. For Fredericks proposed to take his master away whether he wanted to go or not. He knew very well that to suggest to Hartland that he go to the place he, Fredericks, had in mind would be futile. Hartland would only laugh scornfully. Therefore, Fredericks was taking drastic measures, although his action might mean his dismissal.

Hartland came in at dawn fearfully

drunk. Fredericks helped him to a chair.

"Going—to—the dogs," Hartland stammered. "Ought go to—lodge."

"The lodge?" Fredericks smiled. This was playing right into his hands. Hartland had a lodge on Lake George, and he would think he was going there.

"Just the thing, sir," said Fredericks loudly. "Just the thing. I'll have everything ready."

"Want drink," muttered Hartland.

"Very good, sir." And Fredericks hurried for a mild drink of whisky and water into which he put a few drops of a mixture from a bottle.

He roused Hartland and actually compelled him to take the drink. Then he undressed him and put him to bed.

At two o'clock, he awakened his master, who got up sluggishly.

He accepted the drink Fredericks offered him as a matter of course. Fredericks helped him with his bath and helped him to dress. Another drink followed. Hartland had not said a word this morning. He took his coffee and ate his egg as a man in a dream.

"Something's matter," he muttered.

"You'll be all right at the lodge, sir," Fredericks said. "You ordered preparations made to go to the lodge, and everything's ready. We'll go right over to the train. Splendid idea, sir. Splendid!"

Hartland could not seem to collect his faculties.

"Suppose might as well," he muttered, his head nodding. "Sleep on train."

"Quite right, sir," Fredericks assured him. "Everything is arranged."

Meanwhile, Fredericks had attended to the matter of closing the apartment for a considerable period. He was staking everything on Hartland's common sense when he would be himself again, upon the change of environment, and upon a business proposition which he hoped would interest his master.

Shortly after three o'clock they were in Hartland's car. They drove to Grand Central, where arrangements had been made for a drawing-room on the express. Fredericks had the lower berth made up at once, and Hartland lay down upon the blanket and was off to sleep. Shortly afterward, they were on their way to Chicago.

Hartland woke late that night. Fredericks had put a blanket over him and made him comfortable.

"Not there yet?" Hartland mumbled.

"Not yet, sir," Fredericks answered. "Do you want anything?"

"Sure. Want—drink."

Fredericks had anticipated this. It was a mechanical answer. He gave his master a drink of whisky and water, and again the few drops went in. Hartland sank back upon the pillows and went to sleep immediately.

In Chicago next day, Hartland still was dazed. He took the drink offered him automatically, asked no questions about the taxi ride to another station, entered another train without protest. All he wanted was sleep, and he didn't care where he got it. He was in a torpor. Fredericks put him to bed in the drawing-room.

He slept practically all the time for a day and a night and a day, rousing only when Fredericks made him do so to give him nourishment.

"Still on the train?" he would say sleepily. "It's a long night, Fredericks."

"It is indeed, sir," said Fredericks. "We have that little change to make, you know, at the junction, and then we'll be there, sir."

Hartland nodded stupidly.

Fredericks got him dressed late in the afternoon, and without trouble they made the change to the little train which ran up into the mountains. At nine o'clock they left the train at its terminal at Silver City. They went to the Central Hotel, where rooms were

ready for them, Fredericks having made the arrangement by wire. Hartland was taking things as a matter of course, and here he again went to bed.

Fredericks sighed a long, deep sigh of relief.

"Well, I did it," he said aloud. "Now I wonder what he—— I wonder!"

He unpacked the bag, arranged Hartland's toilet articles, and laid out the suit of clothes the bag contained, with fresh linen, underthings, and socks. Then for the first time in three days he got a good night's sleep.

He was up early. He looked out the windows at the pine-clad hills, the sparkling stream—green everywhere save for the mine dumps on the slopes above the town. The air was clean, cool, stimulating. The breeze that came in through the open window made Fredericks' nerves tingle. He recalled the time when he had first come to this place in the Montana hills years before with Roger's father. The elder Hartland had sought a rest in Silver City more than once.

"Well, if this doesn't fix him up, nothing will," he mused.

He heard Hartland stirring in the other room and went in to him. Hartland was sitting on the edge of the bed, rubbing his eyes. Fredericks saw they looked better this morning. He had discontinued the drops. His master looked at him stupidly.

"Just a moment, sir," said Fredericks, "and I'll bring you some black coffee. You're much better, sir."

He hurried away and soon returned with two large cups of black coffee. They made strong coffee in that country, as he well knew.

Hartland willingly drank one of the cups, and the strong potion picked him up as if by magic. When he had drained the other cup, the cobwebs were nearly cleared from his brain.

He looked about the room with a puzzled expression.

"Fredericks, where *are* we?" he demanded weakly.

"We're in Silver City, Montana, sir," Fredericks replied.

The clouded look of perplexity in Hartland's eyes increased. He rose unsteadily and, with Fredericks aiding him, went to the window. There he looked out upon the squat buildings of the mining town, the dusty street, the mine dumps on the slopes, the stands of pine marching up to the shoulders of Old Baldy, snow-crowned, gleaming in the sun.

"Good Lord," he groaned, "it's the end of the world!"

CHAPTER III.

FORGOTTEN.

HARTLAND turned from the window. The dullness was almost gone from his eyes. He was gaining in vigor every minute. His mind was clearing fast.

"Fredericks," he said sternly, "bring me some more of that coffee and order some eggs and toast. Bring the coffee first."

"Quite right, sir," said Fredericks in his old form.

While his man was gone, Hartland continued to gaze out the window. The cool, mountain breeze fanned his face. It was bracing, this air. He had to concede that. Well, he had seen better scenery in Switzerland. How had Fredericks managed it? He intended to find out.

When Fredericks returned with the coffee—two cups again—Hartland drank one cup before he began interrogating.

"Fredericks, how did I get here?" he asked.

"You—ah—slept most of the way, sir," Fredericks evaded.

"Yes, I know that, or I would never had got here," Hartland snapped. "And I didn't sleep on whisky, either;

I can tell by the groggy feeling in my head."

"You've had practically no whisky in more than three days, sir," said Fredericks. Might as well have the thing over with; and he didn't intend to lie.

"You drugged me, then?" Hartland inquired mildly.

"In a moderate way, sir," replied Fredericks.

Hartland dropped down on the edge of the bed and stared at Fredericks in utter astonishment. "You mean to stand there before me and deliberately confess that you drugged me to drag me out here to this ungodly place?"

"I do not think you would wish me to lie to you, sir," Fredericks returned with dignity.

Hartland stared again. "You seem to be *proud* of it!" he exclaimed.

"If it accomplishes the purpose I had in mind, sir, I will indeed be proud," said Fredericks.

"What purpose did you have in mind?"

"To satisfy your wish for something new, to show you that you have at least *one* business that is your very own, and—you'll pardon me, sir—to take you away from the liquor."

"Humph," grunted Hartland sarcastically. "You do indeed seem to have my interests at heart. How'd *you* know I wanted something new, as you say?"

"If you'll pardon me again, sir, I heard you make a statement to that effect to the—ah—lady who visited you in the apartment."

"Eavesdropping!" snorted Hartland. "You think *this* will be new? Mountains? I suppose you've forgotten we've been in Switzerland. And what's this talk about a business?"

"You have a mine here, sir—a silver mine. Your father bought it years ago. I was here with him when he acquired it. Your father used to like to come out here for a rest. He built a bungalow at the upper end of town. Yours is the largest mine in the camp and is known as the Yellowjacket."

A thin smile appeared upon Hartland's lips, and he gazed at Fredericks with elevated brows. "So you thought that because I own a hole in the ground here, it would be best to drug me and haul me out here to see it!"

"It was the only way I could get you here, sir," said Fredericks, his dignity returning. "And I thought you might be interested in the development of the mine, since it is a business you can direct yourself. I have heard you hint, sir, that you would like to be in business."

"Well, you've taken a lot on yourself," said Hartland angrily.

"Roger," said Fredericks slowly in an earnest voice, "I have your best interests at heart. You cannot imagine how it has worried me to see the rut you got into in New York. I have lain awake nights trying to figure out some way in which I could help you. I am not a fool, Roger. I am calling you by your first name because I was in your father's service for twenty-two years and have known you from the time you were a little boy."

He paused, wet his lips, looked out the window.

"When I saw that woman that night," he resumed, "I *did* eavesdrop, as you say. Not only that, but I peeped through the curtains and I saw you toss her a roll of bills. I know her kind, Roger. Anything new *she* could show you would bring you evil. Right then and there I decided to get you away from her and her kind. I know we have been to Switzerland. Your father and I were often in Switzerland. But he always referred to these mountains as 'the hills.' You were here once when you were a little boy. Perhaps you do not remember. I thought you had forgotten the hills,

and that if I brought you here, and told you why, it might make an impression. I'm your servant, Roger, but I love you just the same."

Hartland sat staring at the floor. And he had been on the point of dismissing this man! Still, Fredericks' act rankled. Love or no love, his father's man for twenty-two years or not—he had taken a great liberty. In many ways Hartland was an aristocrat. He was what is known as a gentleman. He could not throw off the cloak of arrogance in a moment's time. Although he realized he had to submit to what he considered effrontery on the part of Fredericks, he had no intention of appearing to condone it.

"About the apartment, Fredericks," he said in his usual voice. "You saw to things?"

"Everything is taken care of, sir," replied Fredericks, reverting to his rôle.

"You brought some things along?"

"There is just one suit here, sir, and linen—at present. There is a trunk coming which contains sufficient changes, and a case in which I put your sporting togs, guns, and fishing rods. There is very good fishing here, sir."

"No doubt," said Hartland grimly. "Well, there should be *some*thing here."

There was a knock at the door. Fredericks responded and brought in Hartland's breakfast.

To his surprise, Hartland ate heartily and enjoyed the food, which was hardly as well prepared as it would have been at Fredericks' hand. After breakfast, he had a bath, shaved, and dressed. He did not know that he had one of the two baths on the upper floor of the hotel to himself. But—had he known it—anything and everything in Silver City was at the disposal of Roger Hartland.

The news of his arrival had spread through the camp like wildfire. The effect of his arrival was electrical. Excitement was at fever heat. "Hartland is here!" was the word that passed from mouth to mouth, and men's eyes widened and then kindled with hope. Was he going to increase the development operations at the Yellowjacket? The main shaft of the Yellowjacket was the deepest in the camp, although it was only six hundred feet down. Did he intend to sink? That seemed to be the mighty question—would Hartland sink?

That morning, on the short, dusty street and narrow sidewalks of the camp groups of men gathered and conversation buzzed. Had any one seen him? None had, and none knew what he looked like. Many who had known the father were anxious to see the son. Silver City was experiencing a genuine thrill—one of those thrills so dear to a mining camp, which are its heart and soul.

The excitement was greatest at the Silver King, the camp's largest resort—a combination refreshment-and-gambling establishment. Here bets were being made as to the reason for Hartland's visit. All knew his father had come to the camp on occasion for relaxation. The purchase of the Yellowjacket had been a whim; an excuse enabling him to claim business there. He had never taken much interest in it. But the son was a young man, not over twenty-six, it was understood. *He* would not need to come there for relaxation. Besides, he was of a generation which seeks relaxation in fashionable resorts, in Europe and the like. No, he probably meant business. Bets to this effect increased.

Hartland was standing at the window when there was a knock at the door. Fredericks answered.

"I'd like to see Mr. Hartland," said a deep bass voice.

"Who shall I say is calling?" said

Fredericks in his best Park Avenue manner.

"Come in," called Hartland from the window.

He turned to see a tall, powerful man, sandy-haired, blue-eyed, smooth-shaven, with strong features. He wore corduroy, boots splashed with what appeared to be gray clay, and held a stiff-peaked cap with a brass holder for a miner's lamp in his hand.

"You are Mr. Hartland?" he said in his deep voice.

"Yes," answered Hartland shortly.

The man advanced and held out his hand. "I'm Jim Miller," he announced.

Hartland took the hand and winced with the other's grasp. "Yes?" he said in a puzzled tone.

"Manager of the Yellowjacket," said Miller, seeing Hartland's look of perplexity.

"Oh, yes," said Hartland. "How do you do, Mr. Miller."

"I heard you were in town," said Miller, somewhat taken aback by the other's manner, and rather awed by Hartland's aristocratic appearance, "and I thought it best to report."

"No occasion for it whatsoever," said Hartland.

"Didn't mean to butt in, Mr. Hartland," said Miller, irritated. "I suppose you'll be up to the mine, and I'm at your disposal any time, of course. Well, I'll be going."

"Good morning," said Hartland, and again he turned to the window.

"Wonder what that bird expects me to do," he said with a frown. "Say, Fredericks, what am I supposed to *be* in this town?"

"As owner of the Yellowjacket, you are the principal operator, sir," Fredericks replied. "In addition to that, you are the camp's hope."

"The camp's *hope!*" Hartland exclaimed.

"They hope you will increase your development here, sir," Fredericks explained.

Hartland laughed. "Well, being a 'hope' is something new, anyway, Fredericks. I'll give you credit for that. Did you bring a stick?"

"One of your favorites, sir," replied Fredericks, who knew Hartland would be lost without a stick.

He brought the cane, and, putting on his hat, Hartland went out the door without another word.

CHAPTER IV.

THE CONSOLIDATED.

ROGER HARTLAND'S appearance upon the street caused an immediate and profound sensation. Every one recognized him at once. His immaculate attire and stick stamped him at first glance as the distinguished visitor. But more impressive than anything else was the air about him, the hauteur of a cultured, traveled man, the aristocratic way in which he held his head. This manner was, of course, natural with him, and none who saw him thought he was putting on airs.

As he strolled up the street, men stepped off the sidewalk to give him free passage. This amused him. In fact, he got a thrill out of it. He was being paid the homage of a mining camp of which he was the hope. This amused him even more. He saw all eyes turned upon him. The hum of conversation among the groups of miners ceased. Absurd, he thought to himself. It was like a scene from a comic play. But if it were carried on it would no longer amuse him; it would annoy him.

In due time he came to the wide-open entrance of the Silver King resort. He looked within, and the scene attracted him. He had never seen anything like it before. A long bar lined with men; many tables at which cards were being played; a roulette wheel,

and other mechanical devices. He decided out of pure curiosity to go in.

As he entered, a high-pitched voice sounded from the lower end of the bar.

"Blimey, 'ere's a bloomin' toff!"

It was "Monocle" Joe. Joe had come into the camp from nowhere seven years before, wearing a monocle. The camp had gasped and then ridiculed and chided him. But he continued to wear his monocle, and when it was ascertained that he was no mean hand at cards, he was accepted, given the sobriquet of Monocle Joe, and the monocle itself was taken as part of the camp furniture. In fact, the camp was ever fascinated by the way in which he handled his eyeglass. It helped him at cards, too. He was short, bowlegged, and red-faced.

"What's a toff?" some one asked.

"A gentleman," was the scornful retort. "Whatja t'ink?"

Meanwhile, Hartland was strolling leisurely down the bar, the cynosure of all eyes.

"Has to carry a cane for fear he'll catch cold."

The sneering remark came from a man on Hartland's left. Hartland stopped and regarded him coldly. Only three years before, Hartland had been a champion boxer at Princeton. Since then his only exercise had been golf, but he remained more or less fit, despite his dissipations.

Still holding his stick in his right hand, he walked over to the man who had made the sneering remark and brought a lightning uppercut to his jaw. There was power behind that blow. The man dropped to the floor as if he had been shot; knocked out.

The proprietor came running around the bar in a rage, grasped the man by the ankles, and dragged him out into the street. He hurried back to Hartland, who had stepped in where a place had been made for him at the bar.

"Sorry, sir, very sorry," he said. "Just a no-good loafer. Didn't know who you were, I expect. He won't come in here again, I'll tell the world that."

The look in the eyes of the men who were openly or furtively regarding Hartland changed from amazement to respect. Here was not only a gentleman, but one who would defend with his fists his right to carry a cane!

"D'ja see the wicked hook he passed him?" whispered Monocle Joe.

The proprietor, "Big" Mose, had hastened around behind the bar to serve Hartland personally.

"Have you any good whisky?" Hartland asked.

"My own," said Big Mose. He hurried to his little office in front and returned with a bottle.

"Would you have one with me?" Big Mose asked, when his customer had taken his potion and placed a bill on the bar.

"No, thanks," Hartland returned. "And I only took that one out of curiosity."

This was lost on Big Mose, who walked back to his office with the bottle, his face wearing a blank look. Queer bird, this. Well, whatever he said went.

Hartland turned to look over the gaming section. As he stepped from the bar he was approached by a portly, florid individual who wore a black-and-white-checkered vest with a large chain across it, from which was suspended a huge charm.

"I guess you're Mr. Hartland," he said pompously. "My name is Mann." He held out a pudgy hand.

Hartland feigned not to see the hand. "Yes?" he said, lifting his brows slightly.

"I'm president of the Consolidated," Mann explained.

"And what has that to do with me?" Hartland inquired.

"Why—er—being mining men, I thought we—er—ought to meet and discuss conditions," Mann stammered.

"Well, I'm not a mining man, so get *that* out of your head," said Hartland curtly, and went on toward the wheel to watch the play a few minutes.

Mann's face went red, then darkened with anger as he strode to the bar for a drink. Monocle Joe's laugh greeted him. The interest in Hartland was more intense than ever.

At last, Hartland turned away from the wheel and beckoned to Big Mose, who came in a hurry. "If there are any Yellowjacket men here," he said, "pick one out who will take a message to the mine for me."

Several men who had overheard this came forward at once. "Go up and tell Miller I want to see him at the hotel," Hartland told one of them. The man hurried away.

Hartland went out of the place and strolled back down the street. He was quite well satisfied with himself and the events of the morning. More had happened in less time than would happen to him in New York in weeks. Again the sidewalk was cleared for him, and he nearly laughed outright. "I guess I'm getting a kick out of this," he said to himself. "Or maybe I'm still working under that dope Fredericks fed me." When he reached his rooms he surprised Fredericks by sitting down on the edge of the bed and laughing heartily.

Miller arrived in less than half an hour.

Hartland motioned him to a chair. "Miller, what is this Consolidated?" he asked.

"So far's I can see it's a condition of the mind," was Miller's reply. "Still, they've got the Huntley, next to us, under option with an agreement that they can work it for a year to determine if it is worth further developing. I don't know what they paid for the option—if they paid anything. And they've taken options on two smaller mines and a lot of claims. That's all I know about them."

"But who *are* they?" Hartland asked.

"Well, a fellow by name of Mann is the president; old Gordon, the banker, is in the deal, and who the others are I don't know."

"Mann came up and introduced himself to me this morning," said Hartland. "Said 'us mining men' should discuss conditions. I turned him down flat and told him I wasn't a mining man, which I'm not."

"He's considerable of a braggart, I reckon," said Miller. "But there's something behind his operations. I'm thinking they've been getting the options on these mines and claims mostly on wind in the hope of selling the lot to a big company and taking a big profit."

"This Mann popular here?" Hartland asked.

"He is, an' he isn't. He's mighty popular with those who have given him options and hope he'll take 'em up. But outside of them an' the bums who hang around waiting for him to buy a drink for the house, he isn't liked very well. You see, he's too loudmouthed."

Hartland nodded. "I didn't fancy the way he approached me. I understand I have a bungalow up here, Miller."

"That's right. It's up at the upper end of town. Nice place, too. Your father built it. The furniture he put in is there yet."

"Is it in good shape?"

Miller nodded. "I've seen to that," he replied.

"Well, suppose you have it opened up," Hartland suggested. "I may stay here for a time—for the fishing." He saw a shade as of disappointment cloud Miller's eyes. He rather liked

this manager. "How's the Yellowjacket coming along?"

"Good as could be expected, considering the fact that no money has been put into it for years."

"Is it paying?"

"Paying expenses, that's all," Miller answered with a wry smile. "I've had to cut down my force. Mr. Hartland" —he leaned forward with an eager light in his eyes—"we should *sink!*"

"What do you mean by that?" Hartland asked curiously.

Miller now talked in dead earnest, for it was his chance to tell the owner of the property what he wanted most to tell him. "We have a shaft six hundred feet deep. That isn't going down very far, but it's the deepest shaft in camp. Now, there's every indication of copper beneath these silver deposits. We have copper stain galore. Butte, you know, started as a silver camp, an' when they went down they got the copper. If we should sink our shaft a few hundred feet lower, I'd bet *any*thing we'd get the copper. I've been a mining man all my life, Mr. Hartland, an' I know the signs. If you would only put in enough capital so we could sink, I believe it would pay you thousands of times over. It's worth the chance."

Hartland rose and waved an arm indicating that the interview was ended. "As I said before, *I'm* not a mining man."

Miller took up his hat and departed with a hopeless look of disappointment on his face.

CHAPTER V.

"ENTER THE GIRL!"

BOTH Hartland's trunks arrived on the night train, and Fredericks busied himself looking after their contents. Hartland went to bed early. He would not tell Fredericks, but he confessed to himself that the air of the hills was doing him a world of good. Moreover, he was beginning to feel rather grateful to Fredericks for what he had done. He was resolved that there would be no more drink for him. And that day he had had more than one thrill. The experience was indeed something new.

In the morning he donned a gray, soft shirt, leaving it open at the throat, riding breeches and boots, a soft gray hat, and took a riding crop. In this attire, Hartland was a striking figure. Six feet tall, of superb build, wavy, blond hair, gray eyes, a firm chin and clear-cut features, he was indubitably handsome. But the way he carried himself was most striking of all. Hartland possessed that indefinable knack of looking like somebody and commanding attention without effort. There was nothing superficial about him. There was not an iota of conceit in him. At all times, under all conditions, he was merely his natural self.

Hartland walked up the street, tapping his right boot with his riding crop, and if he had been a sensation the day before, he was a double sensation on this bright spring morning. Again the sidewalks were cleared for him; again men looked after him; again surmises and speculations ran riot. For it was the general opinion that Hartland took after his father in the matter of being astute, reticent, and self-willed. He would tell no one his plans until he got good and ready. And the whole camp had discussed, with more or less satisfaction, his deliberate snubbing of Mann the day before.

When Hartland reached the upper end of the street, he saw the bungalow on the slope across the creek. It was screened by pines, and the creek was bridged at that point. He crossed the bridge, and when he passed through the pines he saw that his father had indeed selected a delightful site for his home in the hills.

The bungalow was in a little park. A brook ambled through this park, and along its banks golden willows grew. His father must have imported these. There were little clumps of alder, quaking asp, and fir. Around the broad veranda were lilac bushes. They were in bloom, and the air was fragrant with their scent.

Many men were working about the place. The windows had been boarded up, but these boards now were removed and piled on the lawn. Miller was there superintending operations in person. He came down the steps as Hartland approached.

"Good morning, Mr. Hartland," he said. "The place is about ready for you. We've been working since five o'clock. You'll find everything just as your father left it. I inspected it every week myself."

"That was good of you," said Hartland. "It looks pretty good from the outside."

"An' it looks still better inside," Miller assured him as they mounted the steps.

His words proved to be true. Hartland looked about him with amazement. The room they entered might almost have been transferred from a Park Avenue apartment. The walls had been covered with beaver board and then papered. Reproductions of old masters hung upon them. On the mantelpiece of the wide fireplace was a splendid model of a sailing ship, and at either end a tall antique candlestick. In the center was a large library table with a big, shaded lamp in the center. The runner, which covered half its surface, was a delicate piece of tapestry. A long bookcase was on the wall opposite the fireplace. A Japanese cabinet in one corner was adorned with bronzes. There were deep easy-chairs, and a large divan. A thick rug in a dark-green pattern covered almost the entire floor.

"The pater did it up right," Hartland observed.

"An' there are two telephones," Miller pointed out. "The one on the wall in the corner connects direct with the office at the mine. The one on the stand connects with town an' the outside. You can sit at that phone an' talk with New York just as your father used to do."

Hartland nodded, and they went on to inspect the two bedrooms, servants' room, bath, and kitchen. There was a hot-water heater, and Miller explained that the water was piped down from the hills, giving an excellent pressure.

"Well, this will do," Hartland decided. "We'll move in this afternoon if everything is ready."

"Everything will be ready," Miller assured him. Of all things Miller wanted, it was to keep Hartland there.

"All right, I'll take a look over the grounds by myself, and then I'll be going," said Hartland.

He found the little park to be a veritable beauty spot. The mountain spring flowers grew everywhere, and on the slope behind were wild roses, larkspur, columbine, and berry bushes in full bloom.

"Switzerland hasn't anything on this for flowers," he mused.

On the north side of the park he found a wide, smooth trail leading into the pines. He wondered where it led to and decided one day to explore it. At this moment the soft pound of hoofs came to his ears. Some one was coming on the trail. When Hartland glimpsed the rider he gave a low whistle of surprise.

"Enter the girl!" he exclaimed aloud. "And on a good horse, too."

She slowed her pace and rode toward him. He saw she was beautiful—dark-brown eyes and hair, rose-petal cheeks, a pretty mouth; well-formed, too, as her riding habit attested.

She pulled up beside him, looking

down at him from under long, dark lashes. "You must be—are you Mr. Hartland?" she asked sweetly.

"He and I are the same," smiled Hartland, removing his hat. "By Jove," he thought to himself, "she's certainly not hard to look at or listen to."

The girl dismounted. "I'm Margaret Cram," she said, as Hartland bowed. "My father, John Cram, heard you were here and sent me over to see you."

"That was kind of him," said Hartland with another flashing smile. "I'm glad he did."

The girl flushed slightly. "My father supplied the horses your father used when he visited here, and he thought perhaps *you* would want some mounts."

"Well, now, so I do," said Hartland. "I forgot to mention horses to Miller. But I don't need more than one horse, a *good* one. I haven't inquired about saddles."

"Your father had saddles," she said, "and they're probably in your storeroom. We have a fine black gelding father thought you might like to try out."

"Is your father in the stock business?" Hartland asked.

"No, Mr. Hartland, my father has a mine—the Oriole. It isn't much, but now that you've come to stir things up, he will probably be able to get capital to develop it. We have a small place two miles above here, and father always raised a few horses. I believe you would like the black, Mr. Hartland."

Hartland was frowning slightly. "What do you mean by saying I've come to stir things up?" he asked mildly.

"Why—why—if you do what they say you're going to do up at the Yellowjacket, it will make the camp," she stammered. "And, of course, all the mine owners will profit as well as yourself."

"And what do they say I'm going to do up at the Yellowjacket?" he asked. Jove! she was just like a mountain flower.

"They say you're going to sink," she answered, her eyes widening as if she were surprised at the question.

"Great Jupiter!" he exclaimed. "That's all I hear. Sink, sink, *sink!* Like being in a rowboat at sea. And why should I sink?" Anything to keep her talking in that delightful voice of hers.

"To get the copper, of course!"

Hartland laughed softly. "Girlie, we might have to go right on through to China, and then only get a brass idol."

"But aren't you going to sink?" she asked, her face clouding prettily.

"Well, Miss Cram, I'm not going to disappoint you or imbue you with any false hopes, so I'm not going to answer your question," he replied. "What I'm most interested in right now is that black. Will you have him brought over this afternoon?"

"I'll bring him over myself. Father has to keep pretty much to the mine. He's working it alone."

"Good," said Hartland. "And, Miss Cram, will you go riding with me in the morning?"

She flushed at this and was undecided.

"To show me the trails and roads," Hartland explained. "You know I'm strange here."

Something in his voice attracted her. And what a fine pair of eyes! "Very well," she said. "Nine o'clock, from here. Provided you like the black, of course."

"I believe I'm pretty sure to like him, since you recommended him," said Hartland gallantly. No man had more of a way with women.

He started forward to hand her up

into the saddle, but she mounted gracefully and turned her horse.

"Good morning, Mr. Hartland," she called back.

He waved his hat in reply. "If they come like that up here, I guess I'm in for a stay," he said to himself.

He went back to the hotel.

"Fredericks, go up and look over the bungalow and order what you need," he told his man. "You can't miss it. Cross the bridge at the end of the street. We're moving in this afternoon."

On the way up, Fredericks suddenly stopped dead in his tracks. Approaching him was Monocle Joe. He drew up at once as he saw Fredericks staring at him.

"Where'd you get the monocle?" Fredericks blurted, overcome with astonishment.

"An' as 'ow is that any of your bloomin' business?" Joe inquired, fixing Fredericks with his eyeglass.

"Really!" said Fredericks, with the proper accent.

"Strike me pink if 'ere ain't another limy!" Joe exclaimed.

"Ridiculous!" Fredericks exploded.

"An' as 'ow's what ridiculous?" Joe inquired.

"Wearing that monocle up here," said Fredericks.

"You're that toff's man, ain't you?" asked Joe.

"That hardly concerns you," said Fredericks, cloaking himself with dignity.

Strange to say, this had the effect of silencing Joe. The monocle popped out of his eye. Class distinction had instinctively been revived by these two, and a gambler could hardly be classed on the same plane as a gentleman's gentleman.

Fredericks carried his dignity up the street.

That afternoon, Hartland started for the Yellowjacket afoot.

CHAPTER VI.

A THREAT.

THE road to the Yellowjacket led up the slope to the east of the town. It wound through dense stands of pine and culminated in a series of switchbacks to ease the grade. It was down this road that the ore from the Yellowjacket was transported by wagons.

Hartland was trudging up this road, clipping leaves from shrubs along one side with his riding crop, when he saw two men coming down. As he neared them, he recognized the man who had insulted him in the Silver King the night before. With him was a burly individual with a red stubble of beard, and small eyes, set close together. He wore a gun. They veered in and confronted Hartland as they met.

"Say, you tailor's dummy, what was the idear of that stunt you pulled yesterday?" demanded the man Hartland had hit.

"Get out of my way," said Hartland, his eyes narrowing.

The man looked at his companion, then back at Hartland with a sneer. "You won't get through until I tell you a few things, you upstart," he said threateningly.

"I'm not here to listen to anything you have to say," Hartland returned sharply.

"Well, you'll listen whether you want to or not," snarled the other. "An' if you want to keep that lily-white skin of yours whole, you'll clear out of here pronto."

"Do you think I'd take any notice of a threat from *you?*" said Hartland angrily.

"Then maybe you'll take notice of *this!*" cried the man hoarsely.

He swung viciously, but Hartland easily ducked the blow. Then Hartland's anger rose, and red burned before his eyes. As the man made another swing, he ducked under and

gave him the same left uppercut that had floored him the night before. It staggered him but did not knock him down. Then Hartland himself staggered from a blow behind the left ear. The two of them were attacking him!

With two against him, he swung his riding crop. It struck the man ahead squarely in the face, bringing the blood spurting from his nose and sending him to his knees. Hartland turned just in time to avoid another blow from the man behind. He swung his crop, but missed. There was a lightning move of the man's right hand, and Hartland just caught a glimpse of the gleam of metal before the gun roared. It was as if a red-hot iron seared his left side.

Guns! He had never been up against them before. They wanted to kill him! He leaped aside as the gun spoke again. Then his riding crop came down like a flash of lightning on the gunman's wrist, bringing a howl of pain as the gun thudded into the dust.

Hartlad dived for the gun. But he had forgotten the first man. A flying weight flattened him in the dust. He twisted, choking, and managed to get hold of the gun. The second assailant pounced upon him, and as he squirmed to free himself a hand came under and gripped him by the throat. He felt his right wrist gripped, and with every iota of strength he possessed he heaved upward and jerked the wrist free. Sinking down in a twinkling, he whipped the gun around over his left shoulder and fired.

The fingers clutching at his throat relaxed. There was a shout, and the weight upon him lightened. He flung off the load on his back and leaped to his feet. The gunman lay on his side where he had been flung. The other was standing to one side, a white pallor spreading over his face.

Hartland looked down at the gunman, and his face, too, went white. A little pool of red was forming under the man's right temple. Hartland stooped and turned him over. He had a sickening feeling in the pit of his stomach as he saw the bullet hole in the temple oozing blood.

Then he turned on the other man in a fury. "This is *your* fault!" he shouted. "You rat, I've a mind to drop you, too!"

"Don't," the man quavered. "I didn't know he was going to pull a gun in the first place."

"You lie, and you know it!" Hartland accused. "You knew from the moment you saw me you'd use the gun if you had to. Who *is* this man? Talk straight, or I'll let you have it. You attacked me, and I've got every excuse in the world."

"He was Ed Mercer," said the other quickly.

"What'd he do; where was he from?"

"The Huntley," came the speedy reply.

Hartland considered this. He recalled that Miller had said the Huntley was the mine next to the Yellowjacket and was under option to the Consolidated. But there could be no connection between that fact and this attack. Such a thought was absurd.

"Walk along ahead there," he told the man before him. "You're going to the Yellowjacket with me."

The two of them trudged up the road, back and forth up the switchbacks, and reached the mine pretty well winded. Hartland spotted the little white office building at once and ordered his captive in that direction. But Miller was not in the office.

Hartland took his man into the manager's private office, and there they waited while Miller was sent for. It was some twenty minutes before he appeared.

"I was on the six-hundred-foot level," he explained.

"There's a dead man down the road," said Hartland crisply, putting the gun on Miller's desk, "and this fellow wants to tell you about it. Tell him!" he commanded, scowling at his captive.

The man cleared his throat and related exactly what had happened, trying at the same time to make his part in the affair appear insignificant.

"This fellow started it, and I finished it," said Hartland when the man was through.

"What's your name?" Miller demanded.

"Finch," was the reply.

"Well, you can go," said Miller. "But *don't leave the camp!*"

When Finch had left, Miller smiled at Hartland. "That means he'll light out as fast as he can, an' that's just what I want him to do, so he won't be wandering around shooting off his mouth."

Hartland nodded and Miller drew up a chair.

"This is rather serious business, Hartland," he said. "It'll mor'n likely mean trouble with the Huntley crew. They've got a tough bunch over there an' a gun fighter by the name of 'Butch' Allen. He's a killer. What Mann's got him around for, I don't know."

He paused in thought while he rolled and lighted a cigarette.

"You see, they wanted to cut across our claim and join our road," he went on, "an' I turned 'em down. We can do enough damage to that road in winter and spring with our *own* ore wagons without them coming in, too. But that isn't it. Mann's got something up his sleeve. Maybe this killing—er—accident will bring it out. Anyway, it wasn't your fault, an' you were lucky you didn't get plugged yourself."

"Shouldn't we do something about the—the body?" Hartland inquired in uncertain tones. "I've never killed a man before, Miller, and I don't like the sensation."

"I'll send down the spring wagon," said Miller. "I reckon you better go on down. I'll send a man with you to show you the short cut."

Hartland went to the bungalow and found Fredericks installed there.

"Fredericks, did you bring anything strong with you?" he asked.

"Why—yes," Fredericks replied, noting that his master looked rather pale.

"Then I'll take one stiff drink," said Hartland, sinking into a chair.

During the late afternoon, all through the excellent dinner Fredericks had prepared, and that evening, Hartland strove to thrust from his mind the picture of the dead gunman, the pool of blood, the bullet hole in the man's temple. Frequently he would shudder.

He tried to read, but it was no use. Then, late in the evening, there came a knock at the door. When Fredericks opened it, Hartland saw Mann's bulky figure in the doorway.

"Come in," he invited, glad of anything to divert his thoughts.

Mann entered. "Mr. Hartland, you killed one of my men this afternoon, so now I guess we can talk."

"Sit down," said Hartland.

As Miller had predicted, the affair of the afternoon had brought results.

CHAPTER VII.

THE PROPOSITIONS.

AS they sat by the table in the glow of the shaded lamp, Hartland saw there was a difference between Mann on this night and his look and demeanor of the day before. There was more force to the man than he had suspected. His eyes this night were cold, calculating, glittering with a suggestion of triumph. His manner betrayed confidence and eagerness.

"Will you have a drink?" Hartland inquired hospitably.

"No, thanks," replied Mann with a gesture of his pudgy hand. "Drink and business do not mix, Mr. Hartland."

"Very well," said Hartland quietly, "state your business."

This direct assault caused Mann to frown. "It's a serious business to murder a man, Mr. Hartland," he said impressively.

"Oh, has some one been murdered?" asked Hartland, raising his brows.

"Now, don't start that with *me*," said Mann pompously. "Finch has told me all about it. You hit him with your riding crop, grabbed Mercer's gun, and shot him down like a dog. He was one of my best men. This is serious business, Hartland."

"Hasn't Finch left town yet?" Hartland inquired mildly.

"Of course not," Mann replied sharply. "Why should he leave town?"

"I don't know," Hartland answered. "I merely asked out of curiosity."

"Don't you people get gay with Finch," said Mann, shaking a forefinger at Hartland. "He's under my protection."

"I expect that gives him license to lie," Hartland remarked dryly.

"I'll take Finch's word *any* day," thundered Mann, bringing a palm down on the table.

"Well, you have it," Hartland smiled. "What do you propose to do—have me arrested?"

"Ah—not at present," replied Mann. "Perhaps not at all. It'll depend, of course. Yes—ah—it'll depend."

"Depend, I suppose, on what I think of this business you say you have to talk over with me," said Hartland, amused.

Mann bristled. "This isn't a joke," he snapped. "I suppose you know we are working the Huntley mine, next to the Yellowjacket, on option for a year. Now we want to cut through a corner of your property to build a road to join the road from the Yellowjacket. This will enable us to transport more ore, and we are willing to pay you reasonably for the right of way. We are doubling our force of men next week. The road will not injure your property, and some day it might be of use to you. Miller has refused to consider this proposal, but you, as owner, *can* consider it." He looked closely at Hartland.

"Who do you mean by 'we?'" Hartland asked.

"The Consolidated, of course," answered Mann sharply.

"And just what is this Consolidated?" Hartland persisted.

"We'll come to that later," said Mann irritably. "What we are discussing now is the matter of the road. We need that road, and, as I say, we're willing to pay a reasonable sum for the right of way across your property."

"You want a road through there so you can transport more ore, and you're putting on more men," said Hartland as Mann nodded in confirmation. "You must intend to gut the Huntley in a year."

"We're paying a royalty on every ton," Mann declared angrily. "But that has nothing to do with the matter we're discussing. Do we get the road? That's what *I* want to know."

"I'll answer your questions when I've heard all you've got to say," Hartland retorted calmly.

Mann frowned. "Well—Hartland, would you consider giving an option on your mine?" he asked.

"I told you," said Hartland in a rising voice, "that I'd answer your questions when you were *through*."

"Very well," Mann acquiesced. "Now, I've got two propositions to put up to you, Hartland, and there's money for us both in either of them. I've got a year's working option on

the Huntley. I've options on the Silver Queen and Susan mines; they're small, but they haven't been developed, although both have good ore showings. In addition, I have options on nineteen undeveloped claims. These are all grouped together, understand?" Mann was talking very seriously now.

Hartland nodded. "But you speak of 'us' making money, and of you having these options," he pointed out. "Where does the Consolidated come in?"

Mann shook his head impatiently. "I *mean* the Consolidated, of course. But I'm the head of it, which is why I speak the way I do. Now listen. There is a large body of low-grade silver ore here which could be handled profitably by a big company which could put in a mill and develop on a large scale. With the Yellowjacket added, many of the others would come in. We would have a big property to offer. I don't take any stock in this copper talk, but a big company would just as soon have a large body of low-grade ore as a single mine of high-grade ore. Understand?"

"Sounds reasonable," Hartland admitted.

"Good." Mann rubbed his hands. "So there's another question to be answered when I'm through. Will you put the Yellowjacket into the pool and come in with us? Now next, Hartland, is a proposition where you'd make more than any of the rest of us. I believe this will interest you. In fact, I was going to write you in detail about both these proposition if you hadn't shown up when you did. It was a fortunate thing you came at this time. Very fortunate."

Hartland made no comment on this. He took out his cigarette case, offered a cigarette to Mann, who declined, lighted one himself. He was rather enjoying this talk. And it took his mind off that other disagreeable thought which had been bothering him since the affair of the afternoon.

"Hartland," said Mann, leaning on his elbows on the table, "capital is a great thing. You have it. You're a millionaire, I understand. But I've never heard of a man yet who had so much money that he didn't want to make more. Now, here's a chance for you. Handle this thing by yourself. Either buy our options outright, or we'll go in with you. You, or we, can form a company, secure outside capital while retaining control, erect a mill, and develop this low-grade proposition. With a mill, and developing on a large scale, anything from four dollars a ton up will pay. And we're bound to run into streaks of high-grade ore. They've run into patches in your own mine that have run as high as eleven hundred dollars to the ton! And I've got all this stuff of ours tied up tighter than a drum."

He waited for some comment from Hartland, but none was forthcoming.

"You would only have to invest some five hundred thousand, or even less," said Mann. "And you could hold control. Or we might take stock in the company and put in our options. What do you say?"

"Is this all?" Hartland asked, without looking at him.

"That's all, but the last proposition is the best," Mann replied.

Hartland rose. "Now I'll answer your questions," he said grimly. "You cannot put a road across my property. I will not give you an option on the Yellowjacket. I will not put the Yellowjacket into what you call your pool. I will not buy your options, nor undertake the development you suggest under any of the conditions you have stated. Now that you have your answers, you can go. Fredericks!"

Fredericks came in at once.

"Show this man out," Hartland ordered.

Fredericks went to the door and opened it.

"I'll fix you!" Mann shouted. "I'll make you——"

He got no further. Hartland leaped from his chair, grasped him by the collar, and hurled him through the door. He fell on his face on the porch.

"Good night," Hartland called. "Fredericks, close the door."

Fredericks obeyed and stepped softly around the table. His face was white. Strange happenings, these!

"What's the matter, Fredericks?" said Hartland, seating himself. "You look a little white about the gills."

Hardly were the words out of his mouth when the door burst open. Hartland looked around quickly to see a tall, rough-looking man framed in the doorway. He was of swarthy complexion, with small, glittering, black eyes. In his right hand he held a gun with which he covered Hartland.

Butch Allen! thought Hartland, as he remembered Miller mentioning that Mann had employed a gun fighter by this name.

The man strode into the room, his cruel eyes holding Hartland's gaze. Behind him came Mann. Doubtless, Mann had brought him along to intimidate him.

"Now I reckon you'll hear what this man has to say," said the gunman. "An' don't try any funny capers—I'm telling you."

"I suppose you're Butch Allen," said Hartland coolly.

"I'm glad you've heard of me," said Allen, "for you'll be knowing what you're up against. Go ahead, Mann."

"Just a minute!" Hartland's words broke sharply. "Do you think you can come here and scare me with that gun? You know what my position is, and what it would mean if you were to shoot me. I have no intention of listening to anything more this man has to say. Maybe he can talk in the dark, but it won't be very impressive. Fredericks, turn down the wick and blow out the light."

"Stay where you are!"

Fredericks was unable to move under the spell of the gunman's eyes and his tone of voice.

"Oh, very well," said Hartland, "I'll do it myself." He rose and leaned over the lamp.

"Don't try it!"

Hartland straightened. "Do you mean to tell me I'm not the master of my own house!" he said sternly. Then, before Allen could interfere, he turned down the wick and blew out the light. The room was plunged into darkness.

"Why don't you shoot?" he asked derisively.

"I'll give you twenty-four hours to reconsider," Mann shouted. "Remember that. Come, on Butch."

"I wouldn't give him twenty-four minutes," said Allen as they went out.

Fredericks struck a match. His hand was shaking so that he couldn't light the lamp. Hartland took the next match, lighted the lamp, then closed the door. His face was set and stern. But he looked at Fredericks curiously.

"Although I don't suspect you knew you were doing it," he said slowly, "you certainly have given me a taste of something new. Make some tea."

He went to the mine telephone and rang. A short wait, then he said: "Oh, I took a chance on you being up, Miller. Mann and his gunman were up here to-night. I'll tell you about it to-morrow. Put on a full crew, Miller—all the men you can use, and pick them carefully, if that's possible. And you'd better keep an eye on the Huntley outfit. Mann's putting more men over there. That's all. Good night."

He sat down and thought steadily until Fredericks brought in the tea.

To be continued in the next issue of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE.

Justice-Blind and Dumb

By Roland Krebs

Author of "Bagging the Snipers," etc.

EVERY community in the United States, it seems like, has to, at one time or another in its history, wade through a reform wave.

Until just recent, this part of Montana hadn't had a reform wave in the memory of the oldest inhabitant. What's more, I don't think we'll have another for at least two thousand years—and, after that, who cares?

This county's wave was a one-man affair, and it certainly wasn't any permanent wave. It lasted about twenty-four hours, which was just long enough to hand everybody a good haw-haw.

The guy who started the big reform was County Judge MacKenzie, and the guy who finished it was Mr. "Natural" Neely, one of the animal tamers around the R Bar R here.

First, let me introduce Judge MacKenzie to you, then Natural Neely.

Like most Scotchmen, the judge liked oatmeal, smoky barley whisky, money, and bagpipes, although I never held this last against him. Of them all, I suspect that he liked money best—and don't think my suspicion ain't well grounded. A nickel looked as big to him as a manhole lid. Most coin that came Judge MacKenzie's way retired, sort of, from public life. That which did get back into circulation eventually was always tarnished and smelled musty.

While somebody might have liked Mr. MacKenzie, nobody actually disliked the old coot, and somebody's got to be judge, anyway, and so he was elected. Nobody took his speeches seriously during the campaign, because, while he did preach reforms—honesty in government, a clean-living, moral community, and all that sort of ga-ga—he preached them with a breath that you could have hung your hat on.

To the surprise of everybody, it turned out after he was elected, and after it was too late to do anything about it, that the judge was very much

opposed to gambling. In fact, he carried it so far as to fine three railroad men ten smacks apiece after he bumped into them shooting craps behind the freight house in town.

The community as a whole was very pained to discover this narrow-mindedness in our judiciary, if you know what I mean, but the most pained of all was Mr. Natural Neely.

Shooting craps was practically the breath of life to our Mr. Neely. The truth of the matter is that Mr. Neely's first name was Nathan, the whole monicker being Nathan Hale Neely, him having been named after the great patriot that the Spaniards shot in Cuba.

Everybody called him "Natural," though, on account he seemed to be unable to throw hardly anything but sevens with anybody's dice. In spite of his skill with the bounding bones, he never lacked people to play with him, because it was the ambition of some of our leading dice artists—"Hungry" Hosford, Barney Garland, the postmaster; Sheriff Winton, "Slim" Evers, "Shorty" Nolan, and "Red" Johns—to, before they died, be able to out-natural Natural Neely.

I don't think they had, have, or will ever get a chance. I don't mean to insinuate that Natural Neely places the dice or engages in any other kind of crookedness. He's simply lucky. When that baby picks up the cubes, shakes him and them at the same time, and then rolls them, Lady Luck alone ain't helping him. The whole Luck family is—Lord and Lady Luck and little Junior and Sunshine Luck, too.

"Well, this looks like your career is ended, don't it?" I asked Natural when news was brought to the R Bar R about Judge MacKenzie slapping the railroad gents into the county stir and notching their bundles for ten apiece.

"Yeah?" Natural laughed. "How's he going to ketch me? Sheriff Winton and his deputy, 'Hawkeye' Hankins, are among my best partners. See this twenty? I won that off the sheriff last Tuesday."

I reconsidered and decided that maybe Natural's idea was reasonable. I believe it would take an awfully brilliant man to convince Sheriff Winton or Hawkeye Hankins that shooting craps is against any law, and, if there is such a law, that said law ain't unconstitutional or something.

Well, sir, months went by one after another, and in all them months Judge MacKenzie and his prejudice against gambling didn't interfere none with Natural Neely.

Pay day was a big day for Natural, not only on the R Bar R, but around town, too, because the Circle T and Angle H outfits paid off on the same day and everybody flocked to town who could to get rid of his money, such being the nature of us simple souls of this here Far West.

Natural Neely shooting craps was a show—and, me being a former vaudeville star, why I ought to know a show when I see one. Natural was one, all right. He drew a crowd, too, as good shows will.

Natural used to plead with the dice. He'd scold them, threaten them, sing to them, swear at them, praise them, and pity them.

"Now, dice," he'd say, like a father lecturing to a naughty boy, "I want to see you turn up smiling faces—four and three, five and two, or six and one. If I have to take you out to the woodshed again, believe me, it won't hurt me more than it hurts you. I won't stand for any sass from you boys. Get in there now and speak your piece. Brrrr-r-r-rrrr, BOOM! That's better, dice. Gents, it lays there. Does it get a cover or must that money get chills?"

I believe it would have saved different punchers and other citizens a lot of time if they would have deeded their salaries right over to Natural Neely on

pay days, instead of wearing out their spines and their knees and their arms bending over a blanket with him.

I'd like to make the patriotic suggestion that if the U. S. ever has another war it can cut out the Liberty Loan business as too slow and just let the treasury send Natural around the country with a pair of dice.

Somehow or other, as those things will happen, word got to the ears of Judge MacKenzie that Mr. Natural Neely was the premiere danseuse among the Montana crap shooters, and he decided that something ought to be done about it.

It was Sheriff Winton told me about it.

" 'Sheriff,' " our law and order said the judge had remarked to him, " 'I understand that this man Neely, of the R Bar R outfit, is addicted to gambling with dice.' 'I ain't heard nothing about it, judge,' I told him. 'Course, it's possible Mr. Neely does now and then step into a little game of chance, you might say, but I wouldn't call it important—just for small sums, like as not.'

" 'Sheriff,' he bellowed at me, pounding the table with his fist, 'any game of chance for any sum, however small, is against the law. Besides, it's wicked. I want you to keep an eye on that man.' "

"And, of course, you're going to do it, sheriff?" I laughed.

"Well, Al," Sheriff Winton informed me soberly, "when Natural and me meet up, I'm too darned busy keeping my eyes on the dice he throws to be keeping an eye on himself."

There you are!

In visiting town, however, in Natural's company, I noticed that Judge MacKenzie had taken to looking at the champ craps gunner with what Sir Walter Scott used to call a cold and fishy eye. If Natural noticed it, though, he didn't let on, because he used to slip the judge a big grin and a loud and friendly, "Howdy, your honor!"

One day I believed we bumped into the judge two dozen times. I suspected that he was kind of following Natural, sort of, which was funny in itself, because there wasn't any game, big or little, scheduled for that day, and none likely to turn up on the spur of the moment, either.

Two weeks later, though, there was a game scheduled, and it was to be a plenty big one, too.

The word was passed around that it would be behind the old, abandoned railroad tool and handcar shed on the south edge of town.

All the boys and their pay were there —all, that is, except Sheriff Winton and his deputy, Hawkeye Hankins. That, in a way, made it better, all hands wondering if maybe the sheriff had begun to weaken under the judge's lectures.

It turned out, though, that the sheriff and his aid-de-camp, if you want to call Hawkeye that, were out of town for the day on business.

At the last minute, when I was about to cast off from the R Bar R for town, "Bucky" Durbin, our foreman, asked me to attend for him to some very important matters at the bank, him being unable to go himself. I was terrible disappointed, but didn't let on, because Bucky is the sort of a boss that any of his hands would drive a gasoline tank truck through a hot place for.

I was tied up at the bank for two hours and so I missed part one of the great reform drama that was enacted in our happy little municipality. But I and everybody in three counties saw part two!

Part one was this: Natural and the boys had been kicking the cubes around for an hour and a half, Natural with his usual luck, the rest of the boys with their usual lack of luck.

Fred Oakes, one of the Circle T boys, was down to his last half a buck. Al-

though Natural favored big stakes, of course, with plenty to be had, he was a gent and ready to accommodate Fred with the piffling half a dollar in order to give Fred a chance for a comeback.

The two halves were pitched onto the blanket. About two dozen right-and-wrong bets were made among the spectators. Natural Neely had the dice. He made them a little speech, warmed them up between his palms, and then raised his hand above his head, shaking a clickety-clickety-click symphony out of them cubes.

He let loose a couple of Comanche yells to encourage the dice just before he threw. His yells kept him from hearing somebody on the outer edge of the crowd yelp, "Judge MacKenzie!"

Before you could say Jack Robinson or Ignace Jan Paderewski or anything else, why, that crowd had dived around the tool shed and beat it up the railroad tracks in a stampede.

Everybody, that is, except Natural Neely. Natural was so wrapped up in his throw that he was oblivious, if you know what I mean, to what was going on around him. All he knew was that he was trying to throw a seven.

"Sweet dice," Natural chanted, "don't forget your friend. Don't forget who found you in the gutter, picked you up, put you on your feet, and taught you how to eat with a fork! I stuck to you, dice, when you needed me. Now stick to papa. Brr-rr-r-r, BOOM! Ah, faithful little pals! Four and a three, gents. Get Mr. Oakes a barrel!"

Natural looked up from the blanket, but instead of the circle of faces that had been around him, he saw only one face—and that the frowning pan of County Judge MacKenzie.

"Caught in the act, young feller!" the judge announced sharply. "Caught red-handed at a game of chance. You're under arrest."

"All right, judge," Natural sighed. "Where do we go from here?"

He got up off his knees and waited.

"You're going first to jail, young feller," Judge MacKenzie snapped, "and then into my court, and then, very likely, back to jail."

"All right, judge," Natural told him wearily. "I'm ready."

"Isn't that your money lying there?" the old coot inquired, pointing to the two halves on the blanket.

"Sure enough." Mr. Neely picked them up.

"Half dollars!" exclaimed the judge. Didn't I tell you a nickel looked as big as a manhole lid to Angus MacKenzie? Why, say! He'd have counted a penny-ante game as one for high stakes. "Are you reckless enough to wager as much as half a dollar on one throw of these dice?"

It's seldom that Natural Neely shoots for such small fry as fifty cents, and so he answered truthfully, "No, judge, I don't shoot a half often."

"Well, you ought not to!" the innocent old weasel lectured him. "Gambling, son, is bad enough when it involves only small sums, but when it runs into big money its vice becomes more insidious."

Jurisprudence, as it's called, isn't as complicated out here in the West as it is in more civilized communities in the East. Where civilization has reached a higher stage, the dockets of the courts are so jammed all the time that it takes a long while for justice to get dished out. Out here, though, you can commit you a crime before noon and usually know by sundown where you stand—or, in some cases, lie.

Judge MacKenzie and Natural had a little confab, and Natural agreed to go to trial right away that afternoon.

This being a case that interested the whole community, why, practically the whole community jammed itself into the courtroom in a way that any sardine, seeing it, would have decided that his can was a drafty old trap.

Our leading citizens, including myself, were even standing in the windows. You'd think from the mob that Leopold and Loeb, Bluebeard, Captain Kidd, and Attila, the Hun, were on trial, and not just Natural Neely.

The judge went through all the red tape that makes life in court what it is and wound up by asking our Mr. Neely what was his plea to the charge of gambling.

"Why, judge, your honor," Natural answered, "I reckon I plead guilty."

Then old MacKenzie got ready to pass sentence. He closed a law book lying before him, folded his hands and laid them on top of the book, and then frowningly stared at Natural over his spectacles in a way that reminded me of an owl.

"Neely," the court said solemnly, "you stand convicted by your own admission of having practiced a vice dangerous to the economic health of not only yourself, but to the economic health of your fellow men. Yea, even of the community!

"Gambling, Neely, has been outlawed by our legislators in their wisdom as a stab—often a mortal thrust—at the thrift all of us should practice. The man who hopes to enrich himself through games of chance, sir, is a human vulture, for he preys upon his fellow man."

From the puzzled expression on Natural's face I knew he was wondering what the court was talking about.

"The fame of your transgressions," Judge MacKenzie went on, "has come to the ears of this court ere now, Neely. This court, while concerned chiefly with the offense to which you plead guilty, cannot refrain from denouncing you for your mockery of the law, sir!

"You are a type, Neely, which must be dealt with severely, of which an example must be made, to which an unforgetable lesson must be taught.

"For our own good, this court is going to mete our strict, stern, ruthless justice to you."

"Say, Al," Natural whispered to me, sitting right near him, "they can't hang you in this State for shooting craps, can they?"

"No," I told him. "It's not as serious as it sounds."

Judge MacKenzie continued making it sound serious. "Cattlemen, such as you are, work hard for the dollars they earn. No king's ransom are they paid for riding the ranges alone at night in howling blizzards, during the day under a broiling sun.

"This court knows you are a poor man. It believes that, unless it deals harshly with you and teaches you a lesson, you will be an even poorer man because of your delinquencies.

"On future nights when, alone save for your horse, you ride the range, sleet beating your face, wind stabbing at your body, with only the frightful howls of wild beasts to keep you company, thus earning your meagre dollars, permit yourself to indulge in introspection, think how foolish you have been, remember how much better it would have been to have put your earnings into savings at interest.

"Neely, you have pleaded guilty to gambling. In passing sentence, the court hopes that this will be a lesson to you. Neely, this court fines you——"

Judge MacKenzie paused to let Natural get ready for a shock, and also to make the sentence still harder.

"The court hereby sentences you to five days in the common jail, and fines you, poor workingman though you be, the sum of one hundred dollars."

Angus MacKenzie leaned down hard on the last three words to drive home how tough the fine was. If a nickel was manhole-lid size to him, why, a dollar was bigger in his eyes than a ring around the moon.

There was a long pause after that. Natural waited and waited, and finally

turned to me and whispered, "He ain't finished, is he?"

"Sure," I replied.

"Well, what's all this stiff punishment he said he was going to pass out to me?" Our Mr. Neely was perfectly innocent about it.

"The hundred-dollar fine, stupid," I said. "He's a Scotchman, you know."

Natural stared at the judge, stared at the spectators, and then stared at me. Then he grinned—but not so Judge MacKenzie saw it.

"The court would like to add, Neely," Judge MacKenzie said, "that it truly hopes you will, when feeling the sentence severe, consider the court's motives. It wants this to be a lesson to you. Are you in a position to pay your fine, or do you wish to work it out at hard labor?"

"I'll pay the fine, your honor," Natural answered.

He dug ten tens out of a vest pocket and then threw in five for court costs. Judge MacKenzie looked surprised.

"I'm ready to go to jail, your honor," Natural announced.

"The bailiff will take custody of you temporarily in the absence of the sheriff," the judge told him.

Natural stopped short in his tracks and studied.

"Your honor," he inquired, "could I leave with you for safekeeping my valuables while I'm in the stir—my watch, and my diamond pin, and a little money?"

"You may," said the pompous old rooster, dropping the Ingersoll, chain, and pin into a property envelope. "How many dollars have you?"

Natural dug up the contents of three pockets—deep ones. On the desk he put a pile of money such as the secretary of the treasury and people like him only get to see often.

"I counted it just before I went to trial, your honor," Natural explained with a sober face. "There's exactly two thousand eight hundred and forty-four dollars and forty-two cents there."

Say! I thought for a second Angus MacKenzie's eyes would pop out of his head and roll on the floor. He stared at the money like he was seeing a ghost. Then he stared at the unsmiling Natural like he was seeing seven ghosts. After that he licked his lips and passed a hand over his eyes.

Why, the laughing and yells that went up from that crowd were so noisy that you couldn't have heard Judge MacKenzie pounding for order any more than you could have heard a rubber heel stepping into chewing gum seventeen miles away.

The judge finally had to slam his hat on his head and beat it into his chambers to show that court was adjourned.

"I'm ready," Natural announced to the laughing bailiff.

Judge MacKenzie said he hoped Natural had learned a lesson. Sure he did! The lesson Natural learned was that it's foolish to monkey with a savings account and small interest—not for you or me, maybe, but certainly for a guy who can throw naturals like Natural can.

Listen, justice ain't only blind! Sometimes it's dumb!

When Natural got out of jail six days later he brought home with him the sheriff's revolver, most of that month's salary, his watch, chain, and a new saddle. He had taken his dice to jail with him.

A Wolf to Beat

By Edward T. Glynn.

Author of "The Man Who Rode," etc.

CHAPTER I.

"HE'LL GET HIM—NESTER OR NOT!"

THE veteran foreman of the Double X, "Kansas" Keeler, slid from his horse in front of the big white ranch house, grumbled something under his breath, and then slouched on toward the low porch steps, spurs a-jingle.

A few moments later he stood before his young and pretty boss, Nancy Dixon, orphaned owner of the place, and voiced a lament that was plainly becoming an all too frequent story on the Dixon range.

"Yeah, they've done been raidin' our beeves again, Miss Nancy," he began. "I sure hates t' come an' tell yuh, girl, but fifty more of yuhr cows was stole last night. They was them dogies we've been cuttin' out for that shipment next week. Run 'em out that coulee on the upper range, down across the creek, an' no clews left. I've got a couple of the boys out huntin' trail, but guess yuh can savvy what little chance they've got of findin' ary a sign."

Nancy Dixon leaned back in her chair behind the paper-littered desk in her ranch-house office. For a moment she held the foreman's closely squinted gaze in meditative silence; then she spoke with a slow shake of the head.

"Fifty more, you say? That's about three hundred in the past six months," she mused. "Dad never lost that many cattle—to rustlers—in all the years he owned this ranch. Six months, just, since he died—and——"

Kansas moved a step or two nearer to the girl and cut in with an apologetic little cough.

"Miss Nancy, don't think I don't savvy how yuh feel," he interposed. "I sure knows what it means to the Double X losin' cows like that. Course there's other ranches bein' raided too, but—well, there ain't none bein' hit like us, an' that's what's gettin' my goat. If yuh thinks I'm gettin' too old, fallin' down on this here job o' mine; if yuh—well, if yuh thinks I'd orta resign——"

"Nonsense! Not at all, Kansas. Forget that now," quickly interrupted the girl, a wan, deprecating smile appearing on her lips. "Resign? You? After all the years you rode for dad? Why, of course not, Kansas—never!

"Don't think for a moment I'm blaming you for any of the cows I'm losing," she continued reassuringly. "I know you're doing your best to catch the rustlers. Running short-handed like we are—well, it's a wonder to me they haven't cleaned us out of every dogie on the range!"

Again she shook a troubled head, the smile fading from her lips; then she went on, an added touch of graveness in her tone:

"Kansas, I believe I'm going to need you now more than ever before. Things are really worse on the Double X than I guess you've even noticed yourself. One or two more raids like those of the past few months and I'm willing to admit I'm going to be licked, and that completely.

"I've been hoping they'd catch those rustlers before they raided us again; before we lost any more of the cows we've still got left. With notes to meet this coming month——" Again a wan smile stole across her lips and she ended with a meaning little gesture of the hands.

After a moment she added:

"Kansas, haven't you—hasn't anybody—got an idea yet as to who those rustlers are? Of course, it must be an outside gang; still——"

Kansas lit a cigarette and slumped down into a chair.

"Well, yes, in a way, I've got my own suspicions, girl—if that's what yuh mean," he said drawlingly. "Personally, its my opinion there's a snake in the grass up here some place an' we've done got to smoke him out. Now, I ain't a-sayin' anything I can up an' prove, but this here nester on Coyote Creek——"

Nancy Dixon straightened up in her chair, a flush showing through the tan on her cheeks. The look she flashed across the room made Kansas abruptly swallow the rest of his words.

"No, Kansas, that nester isn't any rustler—no more than I am a rustler myself!" she averred. "I'll vouch for him to you or anybody else. Jim Farley isn't that kind of a hombre. I'm sure he's just as honest as I know he's brave. You know how he saved my life—Kansas, you can't forget that?"

Kansas half snorted. "Yeah, I know he's a game enough gent—savin' yore life the way he did up there on the mess sure proves that," he admitted begrudgingly. "Still, any other gent would 'a' done the same—yuh know that, Nancy—if—well, if they'd only got the chance."

He paused a moment, half smiling at the girl; then pursued, a touch of defiance in his tone:

"Nancy, girl, I don't allow it's none o' my business, but don't yuh think it's kind o' foolishlike—lettin' that jasper snoop around up here the way he does Savin' yore life don't go to prove he's strictly on the level—none whatever. That was just a piece o' luck, an' maybe he's usin' it for reasons of his own.

"Ain't nobody here in the valley what knows a thing about him, an' he sure keeps a hobble on his chin. For all we know—well, it's my own personal hunch he ain't so honest as yuh thinks, an' yuh'll save a lot o' cows by hazin' him off this range! If he ain't a spy for somebody's gang, I'm doggone sure he's a-rustlin' beef on his own!"

The girl mused for another brief moment.

"No, Kansas, I can't believe it—you've simply got that nester wrong," she said then. "I can't understand how you'd even suspect him. Why, he's afraid those rustlers won't stop

raiding this valley until they've stolen the little herd he's got himself. He——"

Kansas Keeler gave vent to another audible snicker.

"Yeah? Well, I ain't a-claimin' I can prove a thing I've said—mind that, Nancy," he drawled. "I'm just givin' yuh my own private opinion of things, which the same is shared by plenty others. Take yore friend, Dave Gault, himself," he rattled on. "Next to us, Dave allows he's lost more cattle than anybody else in the valley. He says he——"

Another quick blush came into the cheeks of the girl and the smile on her lips underwent a strange little twist.

"Is Dave Gault accusing this nester, too?" she asked. "He's never mentioned it to me. I'm sure——"

"Well, I reckon he's just done got his suspicions, same as the rest of us—that's all," Kansas hastened to explain. "He just says it's dog-gone funny how come this nester don't get bothered none himself. If it wasn't for the fact that that nester saved yore life, girl—well, I done reckon Dave would say a whole lot more an' we'd be a-runnin' that nester out o' this valley just on pure suspicion alone!"

The girl again held the foreman's leveled gaze for a thoughtful moment before she spoke.

"Well, I'm still sure that Mr. Farley isn't any rustler, Kansas, and I'm certainly surprised to hear that he's even under suspicion," she said finally. "However, there's nothing we can do about it now, so let's just wait and see who's right. If Farley is the rogue you think he is, he won't get away with his game much longer.

"I've lost all the cows I'm going to, Kansas—all I can afford," she ended grimly, "and now I'm going to act myself. I'm going to get an association man to come up here and tackle this case for me alone. Once he's on the job—well, you can bet he'll catch that rustler—nester or not!"

The grizzled old foreman got slowly to his feet, nodding prompt approval.

"That's the caper, Nancy—that's the ticket!" he said enthusiastically. "Can't understand why Gault or somebody else didn't do it before. Get yore cattle range dick up here an' we'll soon get a rope on the skunks we want. Gault's been a-sayin' that a cattle dick wouldn't be no use, but—well, me, I sure dunno."

Still wagging a dubious head, Kansas was starting toward the door when Nancy Dixon spoke again.

"Kansas, don't tell any one I'm sending for that association man," she warned. "That must be a secret for the present, just between ourselves. Until now I've always felt it was an outside gang that was raiding our stock, but from this moment on there are just two men in the valley I'm going to trust, and one of them is you!"

Kansas acknowledged this high compliment by indulging in a flustered grin. He stood for a space returning the girl's half-smiling gaze in silence; then his grin expanding, he ventured slowly:

"An'—an' the other gent, girl? I'll bet——"

Nancy Dixon chuckled aloud. "Don't you do it, Kansas—you'd lose," she said. "The other man is Mr. Farley, Jim Farley, the nester!"

Kansas Keeler blinked in visible surprise; then grinned anew, shook his head, and slouched from the room.

CHAPTER II.

JIM FARLEY, THE NESTER.

JIM FARLEY, the nester on Coyote Creek, had appeared in the valley just after the death of old Sam Dixon and just before the first of the rustler raids which were now getting on the nerves of every rancher in the land.

Coming down from the North, a total stranger to the rest of the folk in the valley, he had acquired a squatter's rights to a small-sized ranch just beyond the edges of the Double X, invested his available funds in restocking the place, and gone ahead, single-handed, in working out his own salvation.

It was two months after his arrival in the valley that Nancy Dixon first had come into his life when, by seeming decree of the ever-scheming fates, it had become his luck to rescue her from certain death under the hoofs of a stampeding herd—a feat of nerve and valor that all who beheld were bound to subsequently include among the sagas of the range.

To the prompt applause of all who had witnessed the deed, Jim Farley had returned but a tolerant, half-deprecating smile. In the grateful eyes of the girl and the handclasp of everlasting thanks she had given him he had found the only recompense he would have asked.

There was that in Nancy Dixon's gaze which had later made him smile whenever he thought of Dave Gault and the look upon his face when, the rescue accomplished, Gault had ridden up to find him seated on his horse, the girl still cradled in his arms.

Dave Gault, a rather handsome-looking, dark-visaged man of dandified ways, was the owner of the biggest spread in all the valley. Like Farley, Gault himself had been a total stranger when, three years ago, he had first appeared in the country and bought the nucleus of his present vast domain.

A man of evident means, he had soon tripled his herds, more than doubled his range, and rose to a power, socially and politically, that none could dispute. For more than a year now he had been the ruling factor in a country big enough to satisfy a king.

It was said of Mr. Gault that he was a man who always got whatever he went after. In proof of this, there was pointed out his ever-growing ranch, his early attainment of political supremacy, his social prestige. There was just one thing that Dave Gault plainly wanted but couldn't seem to get—at least for the moment—and that was Nancy Dixon.

Up and down the valley it was generally agreed that, in the end, Dave Gault would gain his object even there. While old Sam Dixon was alive, it was taken for granted that Nancy was holding off against Gault's ardent, periodic pleas just because she didn't want to leave her aging, widowed daddy all alone. With old Sam's passing, however, it was generally felt that Nancy would promptly lend more attentive ear to anything the moneyed Mr. Gault might say, her father's fortune having noticeably dwindled in the past few years; but if Nancy's mind was in any way changed on the subject in question by her father's demise, there was yet no one in the valley who knew it, and least of all the much-disgusted, ill-tempered Mr. Gault himself.

While inwardly fuming at this unexpected little hitch in his would-be romance, Dave Gault outwardly continued his courtship more assiduously than ever. While there were many men who might have found in Nancy Dixon's evasive smile a gentle hint to keep away, not so Mr. Gault. Like all the rest of the valley, that most persistent worthy was still convinced he'd win the girl in the end; but, unlike the rest of the valley, he no longer was allowing—at least to himself—that he could do it just on his looks and his money alone!

Of Dave Gault and the girl Jim Farley had known but little up until the day of the big stampede; in his own young life their very existence had meant much less than the saddle of the horse he rode. Once the fates had

crossed their trails; however, Jim Farley had found in Nancy Dixon a girl who filled his mind. Dave Gault had then and there made himself a rival, but one who only made him sneer.

Jim Farley didn't have to guess at the cause of this open contempt on the part of the go-getting Mr. Gault. His little ranch was certainly a poor one compared to the princely holdings of the other. More than once had he smiled to himself when sneeringly called "that onery nester with a doggie an' a hoss," by certain of his none too friendly neighbors. That Nancy Dixon would be fool enough to even think! Well, Dave Gault had simply snickered to himself at the very idea of an upstart nester bucking his own full hand in the age-old game they were playing!

The utter contempt with which Dave Gault and most of the others in the valley looked down upon Jim Farley's little ranch was seemingly shared by the rustlers right from the moment of their first, swift blow. At any rate, the Farley Ranch was a place they never struck.

While at first this was a comforting fact to Farley, eventually it proved a circumstance that caused him much concern. There began to reach his ears certain nasty rumors that first made him smile; then came some open talk that promptly made him mad. There were those in the valley who began eying him askance and scowling at the very mention of his name; there were those who started pointing at his own unraided herd—such as it was—and spreading a rumor that others were prone to believe.

Jim Farley had not ridden with the rest of the valley folk in their periodic quests of the rustler band—a nester isn't always wanted even in the ranks of some posses; but once he got the drift of what those ever-spreading rumors might entail for him unless there was an early end to the cattle-stealing raids, he grimly squared his jaw and started riding trail on the rustlers himself.

It was on a hunch of his own that Farley ventured forth—a hunch he had felt for a long time; but the speedy way in which it brought results was no less a shock to him than was the truth it revealed.

The trail that Farley rode had led no farther than a certain little coulee on Dave Gault's ranch—a hidden, isolated spot where Farley once had seen, quite by chance, a certain little thing that cowmen don't forget.

In the belief that it might be a good idea to inspect this place more closely Farley had ridden over there of a certain recent night, intent on spying around. Scarcely had he reached the spot, however, when he caught the sound of nearing hoofs—two riders jogging up the trail he had come himself and lining straight into the coulee.

With hardly a moment to spare, Farley had pulled his own mount back into a clump of bushes and into view there rode Dave Gault and a second man whom Farley couldn't place. It was but another moment or two before the riders had cantered past, Gault talking in a voice loud enough for Farley to hear; and the words that Farley caught had brought to his lips a sudden smile that wasn't good to see!

CHAPTER III.

"THERE'S A WOLF TO BEAT!"

ON the very day that Kansas Keeler was imparting the news of the latest rustler raid to Nancy Dixon, Jim Farley was again riding trail on his own.

This time he was bent on playing eavesdropper at a certain rendezvous which had come to his knowledge through the half-dozen words Gault had voiced within his hearing that night

in the coulee. His present trail led to a trysting spot far back in the hills, an isolated meeting place ideal for men who found it best to keep all trace of their contacts secret.

As he rode along, a grim little smile playing on his lips, Jim Farley mused half aloud, half to himself, his none too pleasant thoughts.

"The crooked, sneakin' polecat—the onery hound!" he muttered. "Sparkin' that girl to her face an' rustlin' her cows behind her back! Dog-gone me, but there sure is a wolf to beat!

"Lucky thing I got that little hunch o' mine an' run it down the way I did. Otherwise"—he shook his head—"well, I sure got a rope on the polecat now, an' if I gets an earful to-day maybe I can pull that rope right quick. Dog-gone, but he sure has run a whizzer on this yere valley; plumb got it bluffed right out o' the game!

"Well, there's one little card he's done overlooked, an' just yuh wait until I gets my chance to play it!"

It was half an hour later when Farley came to a place in the hills locally known as the Devil's Gate, slid from his horse, and led the animal far back into the shelter of the woods. Leaving the horse tied to a tree, he returned to the mouth of the narrow, rocky pass that gave the place its name, took a quick survey of his immediate surroundings and then slipped from view behind a jumbled mass of boulders close beside the trail.

"Done reckon they'll meet about here—right near the Gate," he mused inwardly. "Guess I'm a good two-three hours ahead o' time, but I couldn't take no chances. Well, I sure am curious to know what's up, an' hope my seat is right down front. Didn't hear quite enough the other night to copper my bets, but—well, maybe I'll be drawin' to the little ace card I needs to-day!"

Ingrossed in his thoughts, Farley had been crouching there in his hiding place for almost two hours when the sound of an approaching horseman reached his ears. A few moments later a tall, lanky, mean-faced rider came loping into view along the trail Farley himself had skirted on his way to the present rendezvous.

The rider pulled up at the entrance to the gap and less than a dozen yards away from the spot where Farley was concealed among the boulders. Without dismounting from his horse, the rider backed in between two of the biggest rocks, rolled a cigarette, and resigned himself to thoughts that brought to his mouth a crooked, evil grin. The man was Ike Cramer, foreman on the Flying U—Gault's big outfit—and on first recognizing him Farley cracked a queer, triumphant, little smile of his own.

It was half an hour later when there came the sound of a second approaching rider; this time from the opposite side of the gap. Peering cautiously out from behind his sheltering rock, Farley saw Cramer gently spur his horse back onto the trail and sit there awaiting the newcomer's advent, one hand resting conveniently close to the butt of a belted .45.

Presently he jogged into sight—a squat, heavy-bearded man whom Farley promptly placed as the one he had seen with Gault while spying back there in the Flying U coulee.

It was the newcomer who spoke first, after Cramer had waved a hand in grinning salutation. As befits a man who finds it best to meet and confer in such elaborate secrecy, he came straight down to the business on hand.

"Well, Ike, here's the word," he began: "Everything is set any time Gault wants to sell them beeves. I'm linin' up a deal for all he's got an' all he can rustle us later on. Quicker I get them cows he's got right now, better I'll like this bargain I'm drivin'

back home. If it's O. K. with Gault, I'll bring my boys up here this comin' Friday night."

Ike Cramer's grin widened. "Yuh'll hafta wait another day or two then, 'Bull'—say Sunday," he said. "Gault allowed yuh'd maybe close that deal yuh've spoke about, but he wants yuh t' wait until he's cinched another little dicker of his own. Fact is, Bull, there's a lot more cows he aims t' market along with the herd he's sellin' yuh now."

Cramer grinned still wider at the other's puzzled look; then went on:

"Friday night we're raidin' that girl on the Double X again, an' raidin' her clean. Dave allows that if she loses two-three hundred dogies more she'll —well, I guess yuh know what his game is?"

The other nodded, half frowned. "Yeah, I know—but that's *his* game, not mine," he said. "If Gault done figgers he can land that girl by crowdin' her out of business, then let him go his limit! All I'm seein' Gault about is cows, an' where he gets 'em ain't no truck o' mine!"

He paused a moment, thinking hard, then continued: "Sunday night, then? Well, that suits me. If Gault feels the same—well, he knows where I'm at. Just yuh tell 'im I can handle all the beef he's got, an' let 'im think o' that on Friday night."

Ike Cramer flashed the bearded man another evil smirk. "Yeah, I'll tell him, Bull," he said. "I done reckon he'll accommodate yuh plenty—an' that's whatever! What with the five-six hundred dogies we've already got cached up there in Cottonwood Basin you——"

Bull Morgan wheeled his horse halfway around. "Good enough, then—an' the more cows the better," he interposed. "I'm tellin' yuh I'm closin' a deal what beats anything Gault was ever in before. Just yuh tell him fill that basin full o' beef on Sunday night an' I'll be there with cash enough to cover every dogie in the herd!"

He paused, eying the other very sharply; then added, a sudden change in his voice: "Well, that's that, Ike. Now about a little something else. That offer I made you personal a little while ago, it still stands pat. Any time yuh quits with Gault, Ike, yuh knows where t' swing yuhr rope."

Ike Cramer nodded. Into his eyes there came a sudden, greedy light. He seemed to ponder for a moment before he spoke.

"Yeah, I savvy, Bull," he said then. "I'm mullin' things over. Gault sure is gettin' rich in the game up here, an' nobody knows it better than me. I'm just waitin' till he lands the girl, an' then—well, either I gets an even split on his pile or there's gonner be a widow on the Flying U!"

Bull Morgan chuckled deep in his beard. He shot the grinning Cramer another sharp look.

"Done reckon Mister Gault is sure in a jackpot there, Ike," he grinned. "Didn't none figger yuh'd ever go to double cross a gent, though."

Ike Cramer swore. "That won't be no double cross, Bull—none whatever," he interrupted quickly. "There's plenty of folks around in here what could double cross Gault—double cross a lot of us—right this minute. I'm just aimin' to beat out Gault on a showdown of his own.

"Maybe yuh never knowed it, Bull," he continued defensively, "but once he gets that girl, Gault done figgers to quit this game, sell out here an' move up North. Done figgers to settle down some place where nobody knows him and nobody down in here can trail 'im. I just aims t' see I'm gettin' mine afore he goes. Gault done owes me plenty, an' I sure intends to collect!

"Nope, Bull, this ain't gonner be no double cross o' mine," he finished. "I'm just gonner see as Gault he don't skip

out an' come no double cross himself. Leastways not on *me!*"

Bull Morgan scowled; then grinned again.

"Ike, yuh've said it—there sure is plenty as could double cross the bunch of us," he averred slowly. "If Gault is one of the kind that would—well, a widow on the Flyin' U will plumb suit me! Howsomever, that ain't got nothin' to do with cows or Sunday night," he ended abruptly. "Cottonwood Basin, midnight, an' cash on delivery. That's the word to Gault, an' adios till then."

With a parting wave of the hand, Bull Morgan raked spurs to his horse and galloped back through the narrow pass along the trail he had come. Ike Cramer watched until the bearded one had vanished from view; then swung his own horse around and slowly jogged away, still grinning to himself as he rode.

It was not until both men had been gone a good fifteen minutes that Jim Farley emerged from his hiding place among the rocks and repaired to his waiting bronc. Untying the horse, he swung into the saddle and started home along a trail that cut deep into the wooded hills.

"Friday night, eh, and that's his game?" he mused as he rode along. "Figgers if he busts that Dixon girl complete he'll—the two-faced hound! Sweet little pal he's got there in Cramer; nice little snake just like himself. They'd double cross each other, would they? Well, they won't get the chance!

"Tuesday now, an' it's ninety-some miles to them rangers down in Tonca. Well, I've done got to make it down an' lead 'em back by Friday night. Can't nowadays trust no gent in the valley, they sure ain't got no use for me; but after this"—he smiled a little more grimly, then finished: "Cottonwood Basin, six hundred cows. Reckon they're most of the stock Gault's been stealin' for the past few months. Done figger we'd best go get them dogies first, then jump them snakes on the Flyin' U. This yere Bull Morgan—— Well, I sure dunno just how we'll bag that polecat along with the rest, but I'll bet them rangers do!"

CHAPTER IV.

"I OWE JIM FARLEY THAT!"

IT was bright and early the following day when Dave Gault cantered up to the Double X ranch house on a magnificent roan that was the pride of his envied cavy.

The dandified owner of the Flying U greeted Nancy Dixon with a grandiloquent sweep of the hat as she came to the door. Any other person than Gault himself might readily have seen that the forced little smile which appeared on the lips of the girl was in no way inspired by the pleasure of his visit.

Gault saw only the troubled, worried look in her eyes and the tired little droop of her shoulders and grinned covertly at something in his thoughts. Stepping back to the edge of the veranda he perched himself atop the rail, rolled a cigarette, and beamed an unctuous smile upon the girl as she seated herself near by in a big, old-fashioned rocker.

"Well, what's happened to my little girl now?" he began half teasingly. "Cook left yuh flat or Kansas Keeler done bought himself another yellow shirt? Yuh look as plumb mournful as——"

Nancy Dixon half suppressed her smile. "Don't make fun of me, Dave; I feel bad enough as it is," she interposed. "Those cattle thieves were back on the range the other night and ran off fifty more of my stock. You know what that means to me; you know—well, Dave, I'm going to be licked if

they steal any more, and I might as well admit it now!"

Dave Gault feigned a quick surprise and ready sympathy at the news the girl imparted. Slipping from his perch on the rail he stepped to Nancy's side and laid a proprietary hand on her arm.

"Nancy, I didn't know that—about this raid the other night," he said, all attempt at banter now gone from his tones. "Dog-gone it, girl, but I sure am sorry for that! The way that gang has been rustlin' your stuff on the Double X"—he shook his head, frowned, and then went on: "Nancy, it sure is tough on you, and I can savvy now what's keepin' yuh so worried. Dog-gone them rustlers, anyhow! I sure been hopin' we'd catch 'em 'fore they hit yore place again; but——"

Again he shook his head, half smiled, and then continued, his hand once more resting on the arm of the girl:

"Nancy, it's a dog-gone shame to see a girl like you bein' worried to death by a gang o' cutthroats, cattle-stealin' coyotes. It's a dirty deal an'—Nancy, why do yuh stand for it? There ain't no need yuh should. Yuh know that as well as I do, girl. Yuh know I love yuh, yuh know I want to marry yuh. Nancy, why don't yuh say the word an' give these worries up? Marry me, girl, an' let me pack the troubles for us both!"

Nancy Dixon dropped her eyes under his eager gaze. Quickly she then looked up again.

"No, Dave, I can't do that. I'm not a quitter, waiting for the chance to dump my troubles on somebody else," she said smilingly. "I like you, Dave, you've been awfully good to me," she continued, "but as for getting married—no, Dave, I'm sorry, but I still must decline. I guess we'd better stay just what we are, neighbors and the best of friends."

Sudden disappointment clouded Dave Gault's face. Inwardly he cursed. Down in his heart he felt a sudden, jealous pang which somehow had rankled there for the past few weeks. When he spoke again there was a little twist to the smile that played across his mouth.

"Well, Nancy, I'm still going to keep right on hopin' yuh'll change yuhr mind—that one o' these days I'll be a lucky gent an' get the answer I want," he said slowly. "I ain't noways givin' up my chances yet a while, girl—not any. 'Course, if there was somebody else; if yuh——"

He chuckled audibly; then finished, eyes once more focused full upon the girl: "Nancy, it ain't on account o' some other man; say that nester, maybe——"

The girl flushed quickly. "Let's leave Mr. Farley out of this, Dave," she cut in a bit reprovingly. "I'm sure there isn't any reason why we should mention him here. Mr. Farley hasn't"—she paused, half smiled, then ended: "Well, if Mr. Farley ever cares to speak for himself I'm sure he's a man who will."

Dave Gault shot the girl a quick, hard look. His smile twisting into the semblance of a sneer, he resumed his perch on the veranda rail.

"Yeah, Nancy, he certainly will—gall is all that hombre's got," he agreed. "He plumb had his nerve aplenty, traipsin' down into this yere valley with nothing but a couple o' cows and a rope! How come he's done got by ever since is something me an' a lot of other folks are tryin' to find out. Right now that hombre is plumb suspected——"

Nancy Dixon got slowly to her feet.

"Yes, I've heard about that, Dave, about Jim Farley being under suspicion for stealing our cows," she averred quietly enough. "Nevertheless, I won't believe he's guilty until I'm shown the proof. I owe Jim Far-

ley that—my confidence—and the valley knows why. I'll thank you, Dave, never to say another word against him—not to me—until you can prove what is only gossip now!"

Dave Gault's face went dark in a sudden rush of anger. With seeming effort he controlled himself and slid from the rail. There was a fawning smile back on his lips when he spoke.

"Well, I sure admire the stand yuh took there, Nancy—I can savvy how it is," he beamed. "O' course, we can't forget that nester saved yore life; he's sure entitled to a lot o' thanks for that. I can see where yuh'd feel for him there; I'm givin' him credit myself, but——"

He grinned anew and held out a hand in parting.

"Well, good-by, Nancy; I'll be swinging back here in another week or so," he said. "Meanwhile, don't forget I'm still packin' hopes; still waitin' for the word I wish you'd given me to-day. Now cheer up, girl, don't worry. Yuh know there aint no reason why yuh should."

Nancy Dixon nodded understandingly. Briefly she touched his proffered hand.

"Good-by, Dave, and do call again," she smiled. "Just you catch those rustlers and I won't have to worry any more!"

CHAPTER V.

KANSAS KEELER DRAWS TOO LATE.

DAVE GAULT was in a most unpleasant frame of mind as he rode back toward his own big ranch some twenty miles away. He followed a little-used trail that circled the edge of the Double X, his mood growing more venomous with every mile he covered.

It wasn't so much that Nancy Dixon had again declined his proferred hand—that was to be expected; in the end, pretty soon now—once——

Dave Gault snickered inwardly at something in his thoughts; then abruptly he scowled again and mouthed a bitter word.

"It's that dog-gone nester—that's what's the trouble," he averred, half aloud. "Didn't think she'd really fall for him, but danged if she ain't! What I should 'a' done is crowded that hombre out of the game right at the start; but"—he snickered again; then continued: "Well, there's more'n one way to skin a cat, an' yuh can bet I know 'em all! After Friday night I guess that Farley gent won't look so good as he does right now. Savin' her life won't get him much, once I've shown him up as the gent what's stealin' her cows!

"Yes—sir, it's time I got busy an' gave that jasper a ride he won't noways live to forget. If that Dixon girl ain't eatin' out o' my hand in another week or so—well, I don't know my book, an' that's whatever!"

Mulling over a vengeful scheme that had first come to his mind on leaving the Dixon Ranch, he jogged along for another two or three miles; then swung off the trail and cut down into a thickly wooded bowl. He rode through this for the distance of another half mile; then suddenly reined up his horse on the edge of a clearing. There, but a few yards ahead of him, a big black cow wearing the brand of the Double X was contentedly grazing in a patch of knee-deep grass.

Dave Gault sat his roan for several moments, watching the cow with an evil, gloating smirk. It was a stray he had seen in the bowl that very morning—Dave Gault was an observant man wherever he rode—a stray that now fitted in to perfection with the scheme he had in mind.

Easing out of the saddle, Gault unhooked his lariat and moved toward the edge of the clearing.

"Well, I done reckon I've got that

nester good as swingin' by the neck right now," he mused. "This here little trick is sure gonner settle his hash, an' that complete! I'll just rope me that cow, then haze her into some nice, handy place for Friday night. After we've jumped the Double X, I'll have one of the boys come back an' turn this critter loose in Farley's herd. I'll take one or two cows of my own an' plant 'em there as well.

"After everybody's heard about the raid—well, I'll just see to it that somebody accidentally finds them cows in Farley's stock, an' then let him prove how they got there!"

Still grinning to himself as he mentally pictured the nester's pending fate, he uncoiled his lariat, stepped out into the clearing, and spun the loop into space. His aim was perfect—Gault was an adept roper—and the cow never had a chance. A few moments later Gault was back in his saddle and ready to resume his way, the captive dogie trailing on behind.

It was just as he spoke to his horse and started riding slowly forward that a voice calling from the thicket in front abruptly froze the grin on his face. Yanking his roan to a sudden halt he glanced toward the sound of the voice, and paled in mingled surprise and rage at sight of the horseman who came riding into view—Kansas Keeler, foreman of the Double X!

Kansas halted half a dozen yards away and swept a frankly curious gaze over both the chagrined Gault and the stolen beeve on the end of the latter's rope. There was an ominous, half-accusing ring in Keeler's tones when he broke silence. One of his hands was sliding toward his belt; the other he waved toward the captive cow.

"What's the idea, Gault—where yuh takin' that dogie?" he asked. "Danged if I don't think yuh——"

Dave Gault burst into a nasty, deprecating laugh. Simultaneously he swept a hand to his hip, whipped out a gun, and fired point-blank at the other's heart. Keeler swayed in the saddle for a moment, a puzzled, agonized expression on his face; then pitched headlong to the ground, dying as he fell.

His startled horse wheeled around and began to run. Gault laughed again, raised his smoking .45, and brought the animal down with two quick shots.

Slipping from the saddle, Gault then crossed to the spot where Keeler lay and dug the toe of his boot into the lifeless cowboy's side. All semblance of a smile gone from his lips, he stood for a space staring down at the luckless Keeler in meditative silence. With an oath, he then wheeled back to his horse, flung himself into the saddle and spurred forward, dragging along the Double X stray.

"Blast the luck—I sure didn't figger on no jam like that!" he muttered. "Killin' that hombre sure upsets my plans. Had to do it, though—couldn't help it," he continued. "After what he sees an' what he thought—well, I just couldn't let that snoopin' jasper live!"

"Guess I'll hafta work a little faster now; change the dope all around. 'Stead o' waitin' until Friday night I guess I'd better plant this cow on Farley's range right *pronto*—to-day. Done reckon there'll be some howl go up when they find that Keeler is dead—murdered—an'—well, I guess there's a way to pin this job on Farley, same as everything else!"

Again he indulged in a gloating chuckle; then added grimly:

"Only hope as nobody heard them shots! Don't reckon they'll miss Keeler until he fails to show up to-night. Lucky thing I killed his nag; might 'a' streaked it for home, an'——" He shook his head. "Well, that sure was a tough little break for Keeler,

catchin' me the way he did," he finished; "but this yere Farley—danged if that ain't gonner be a laugh to remember!"

CHAPTER VI.

"FARLEY DID FOR KEELER!"

A GRIM-FACED little group of men sat in the semidarkened parlor of the Double X ranch house. Outside, dusk had long since settled down upon the range. For the most part the men in the room were silent, but now and then one burst forth into muttered, vengeful words. Heads thereupon began to wag, and bitter threats fell from many lips.

Three hours ago, in the late afternoon, the body of Kansas Keeler had been found where an unknown killer's gun had brought him down. Two passing riders, taking a short-cut home to a neighboring ranch, had come upon the scene, quickly perceived the foulness of the deed, and hastened away to spread the news.

One hour later that grim-faced little band of men had begun to gather at the Double X. They were men of a breed little given to words; men with certain fixed ideas of their own about any one who would commit a crime like this. Kansas Keeler had been known as the fastest shot in the valley; the fact that his own .45 was found untouched was proof sufficient of the treacherous deal he'd got!

The body of Kansas Keeler was now being prepared for burial in the local undertaking shop down in the little valley town of Cayuse. To-morrow it would be laid to rest with fitting obsequies out on the range that Kansas loved.

There was a sudden stir among the men in that crowded little room as the drumming sound of nearing hoofs caught the ears of all. One gaunt, hard-bitten old-timer pushed back his chair and started toward the door.

"That's Dave Gault a-comin' now, boys," he said. "Sure is crowdin' that bronc, whatever he's got for news. Personally, I don't take much stock in that hunch o' his, but let's hope we're ridin' somewhere's soon!"

Half a dozen of the men stood waiting on the porch when, a few moments later, Dave Gault and one of his hard-riding waddies came pounding up to the house. Sliding from their mounts, the newcomers slouched toward the steps. Gault gave the waiting group one quick glance; then waved them all inside.

Once in the crowded little parlor the owner of the Flying U faced the eager, grimly silent band.

"Well, boys, that hunch o' mine was right—we've done got a line on that killer at last," he began, a triumphant ring in his tone. "Boze here sees a man down in them breaks this afternoon and he spots him for that nester Farley. The feller was hazin' along a cow, an' Boze allows it was a Double X stray.

"To-night, soon as he hears about poor Kansas, Boze just tells me about that jasper bein' in the breaks an' we takes a little ride. Down there on Farley's range I'm dog-goned if we don't find that Double X stray! It's right there hidden up a coulee, an' Farley he's done switched the brands!"

Gault paused a moment, as though to let the import of his words sink home; then went on, a gloating twist coming into the smile he could not restrain.

"Now, gents, it's my belief that Farley did for Kansas. It's my dope that Farley was stealin' that stray when Kansas popped out o' the breaks an' caught him cold. Moment Kansas popped out, I done reckon Farley fanned a gun an' dropped poor Keeler on the spot. Can't yet savvy why Kansas didn't fan his own .45, but it's plain he didn't!

"Now, what this onery nester wanted with that one little stray I don't know. Chances are he's one of the gang what's been raidin' our beeves an'——"

"Keno. Ain't no question about that now—none whatever," some one interrupted. "Yuh've done said enough, Dave. That buzzard sure is the bird we're gunnin'. Now, let's go an' bag 'im!"

There was a chorus of prompt approval. Every man in the room half turned toward the door. Dave Gault grinned a little wider and held up a hand.

"Just a minute, boys—we all can't go at once," he said. "I've got this little party all figgered out myself. I'll take five-six o' you gents an' we'll fog it right down to the Farley place. Rest o' you boys had best stay here until we fetch that coyote back.

"They'll be comin' home with Keeler's body any minute now, an' we can't leave the women folks here alone to greet 'im. Savvy? I'll take Boze, 'Buck' Curley there, an' you three boys of the Circle J. Come a-runnin', gents. We're ridin' now!"

There was a murmured protest on the part of those left behind, but another wave of Gault's decisive hand checked the general rush for the door as the chosen few stepped out. As Gault turned to follow, Nancy Dixon, her face gone strangely pale, quickly crossed the room and laid a restraining hand on his sleeve. With two other women—wives of near-by ranchers—she had joined the group of men in the parlor when Gault arrived with the fateful news that meant so much to her nester friend—guilty or not—down on Coyote Creek.

"Dave, there must be no lynching on the Farley place to-night—no killing," she said, her eyes full upon the other's clouding face. "I'm asking you to promise me that before you leave this house. If Farley is guilty—like you say—it won't be hard to prove it. If he isn't—he mustn't come to harm. Bring Jim Farley back to me, back to this house, and then we can turn this whole case over to the sheriff."

Dave Gault half laughed. Quickly catching himself, he patted the girl on the shoulder.

"Don't worry, Nancy, I'll give that nester all the chance he wants," he said. "Right now it's up to him—flat. If he don't want to come back peaceful—let him fan that gun of his again!"

Gault eyed the girl for another half moment, then wheeled away, with a smile she didn't see. Then he stepped outside. Presently there came the sound of creaking leather, the champing of hoofs; then, a curt command, and the posse was off into the night.

Back in the crowded, darkened parlor there began another buzz of conversation. All talk now centered on a single point—Dave Gault's chance of bringing Jim Farley back alive. There were those who didn't think he would—and snickered at the thought. There were others who trusted that he would, but not for the sake of Farley himself! Their one concern was a vested right to see a vengeance in the taking—a vengeance that was riding swift that night across the valley range!

Nancy Dixon stood for a space staring out into the gloom, alone. Her heart chilling at a fear that grew within her, she finally turned away from the window, crossed the room, and slipped, unnoticed, back into the kitchen. Another moment or two and she was out in the open air racing straight toward the near-by corrals.

"They mean to kill him—lynch him; he won't have a chance," she half cried to herself as she sped along. "I've got to warn him; see he gets away. I can't believe he shot Kansas. There must be some mistake. If there is, they'd never let him prove it. If there isn't, if he's guilty"—she paused, then

added confidently: "But he isn't. I know he isn't. If I thought he was—well, I wouldn't try to save him, even after what he did for me!"

Once at the corral gate Nancy gave a low, soft whistle and there trotted to her side a sleek, black horse that was the pet of her cavy. It took but a minute for the girl to slap a saddle on the horse and mount. With a quick, backward glance toward the house she gently spurred the beast and raced away.

CHAPTER VII.

"THIS PROVES HE'S GUILTY!"

ONCE swallowed in the gloom of the starless night, Nancy Dixon had no fear of being followed by those she had left behind. It would be another five minutes or so before her flight was noticed—perhaps longer; and by then—Nancy indulged in a grim little smile and urged her mount into a faster gait.

The course that Nancy took in racing toward the Farley Ranch cut straight across a section of her own big place—a rugged, unused corner of the range that was dangerous enough to ride in daylight, but almost suicidal to attempt at night. It meant a saving of at least five miles to her goal, however—five miles less than the open trail that Gault and his posse now were pounding—and Nancy scoffed at the perils.

Up through a chain of wooded hills, down across a stretch of bad lands, on through the black, treacherous mazes of a canyon, she rode, trusting alone to the sure-footed gait of her horse, and luck, to carry her safely out to that lonely little house—her goal—on Coyote Creek.

Mile after mile she put behind her, death grazing her a dozen times as the galloping steed she rode half stumbled on treacherous ground; one hour, two—and then up through a coulee she raced, less than a mile from Farley's house.

Five minutes later she was sliding from the saddle in front of the darkened, silent house. A moment she stood beside her panting horse, her ears strained to catch any sound on the still night air. At first there was none, nothing she could hear; then came a sudden, drumming sound of hoofs that made her face go pale. Dave Gault and his possemen were coming up the creek! In two or three minutes——

Quickly the girl turned from her horse and ran to the door of Farley's cabin. That Farley hadn't heard her coming, that the house was in utter darkness despite the early hour of the night—Nancy gave no thought to these things as she pounded on the portal, fearful every moment lest the posse swoop into view before she could spread the alarm she had ridden so far, so desperately, to give.

One moment, two, three, she rapped on the door, but without result. There came not a sound, not a stir, from within. In frantic haste she pounded again, harder than ever; but all that reached her ears was the ever-growing sound of those swiftly nearing hoofs!

Her heart growing sick within her, she ran around to the side of the house and beat upon a window with the handle of her quirt. Again it was in vain; no sound within, no answering call, nothing but the fateful drumming of those hoofs, the posse now but a hundred yards away!

Over Nancy Dixon there swept a fear, a doubt, a horrible suspicion that left her staring dumbly into the night.

"He's gone—he isn't there," she said aloud. "I wonder——"

With effort she pulled herself together, smiled grimly, and walked back to the front of the house. There Dave Gault found her standing beside her horse when, a few moments later, the

posse galloped up and slid to earth, their guns drawn, almost as one man.

It was Gault who first recognized the girl as the riders quickly circled her under the sweep of leveled arms. Promptly he holstered his own drawn gun and stepped to her side.

"You—Nancy? What yuh doin' here?" he demanded, almost gruffly. "Why, dog-gone it, girl——"

Nancy Dixon moved back beyond the touch of his outstretched hand. Into her eyes there flashed a glance of mingled scorn and defiance as she cut in upon his words.

"I came to give Jim Farley a chance to save his life," she said. "I was afraid you wouldn't keep your promise to bring him back to the sheriff and to me. I was afraid you'd kill him on sight; lynch"—she paused a moment, a faint smile coming to her lips; then added: "Well, I guess I didn't need to come, to race you here at all. Jim Farley has gone. He's not in there. If he was, he would have answered me, I'm sure of that. I—I'm afraid——"

Dave Gault stepped a little closer to the girl, peering hard into her face. Of one thing he was certain—she was telling the truth. With a rasping laugh, he turned toward his scowling, disappointed mates.

"Well, boys, I reckon we're here a little too late," he said. "That cattle-jumpin' coyote has given us the slip. That proves one thing, though," he continued; "proves he sure killed Kansas Keeler an' knew we'd find it out. Well, he won't get far, boys; we'll see to that. He's done hung himself by runnin' away, an' that's whatever!"

Gault grinned as the riders all nodded in prompt agreement with his words; then turned back toward the girl and spoke again.

"Nancy, this here ain't gonner be no place for you in case that nester comes sneakin' back home," he said. "Done reckon yuh can see he sure enough is guilty now. Danged good thing he wasn't home when yuh rode up here to-night; otherwise, I done allow he'd 'a' dropped yuh cold, same as he did poor Keeler. Chances are he'd 'a' thought yuh was up to a trick an' drilled yuh plumb on sight."

"Come, Nancy, let's you an' me fog it back to the Double X," he pursued. "These yere boys can stick around a while an' see if Farley traipses back. If he does—they'll get him; don't worry 'bout that! I'm hopin' they gets him alive; but if they can't"—he grimaced meaningly, then added: "Well, Nancy, let's be ridin'. Guess there ain't nothin' yuh can do here now, an' the folks back home must sure be wonderin' where yuh've gone."

Nancy Dixon seemed about to speak, then suddenly checked herself. Slowly she glanced toward the darkened house, a troubled, doubtful little frown appearing on her brow. Abruptly, she then turned toward her horse again and swung into the saddle. Without a word she started riding slowly away.

Gault quickly stepped to his own waiting horse, mounted, and beckoned to his side the man called Boze. He addressed the latter in whispered, hurried tones.

"Done reckon Farley must 'a' gone to town," he said. "Don't matter, anyhow. Ain't no alibi can help that jasper, even if he gets the chance to spring it. Now go ahead an' do your stuff. What the rest o' them waddies there don't know won't ever hurt 'em. I'm seein' the girl back home an' yuh can leave the sheriff t' me. Case Farley does come back—give him my regards!"

The evil-visaged Boze grinned his understanding and moved away. With a parting shout to the rest of the men, Gault thereupon raked spurs to his horse and galloped after the girl, now many yards ahead.

In deference to the unhappy mood of the girl, Gault wisely kept silence as they cantered back together along the starlit trail. Only once or twice did he venture speech, and then it was merely to praise the girl for her loyal attempt to save a man she now must know was even a bigger scamp than he was painted. The fact that his words evoked no comment from the girl only made him smile the more as he mused on certain things she'd never even guess!

Thus immersed in their respective thoughts they had ridden back for a distance of about five miles when, topping a rise, Nancy Dixon glanced around, gave a little cry, and abruptly checked her horse.

The sky above the Farley range was tinted with a dull red glow. One glance and the girl well knew what that flaming sky meant. The look she flashed into Dave Gault's face quickly froze the leering grin on the latter's lips.

"They're burning Farley's range—they've set his place afire!" she cried. "I was afraid they'd do some trick like that! I ought to have stayed behind; I——"

Gault reined his horse a little nearer to the girl. He spoke with an open sneer.

"Don't worry 'bout that coyote, Nan," he interposed. "If the boys are burnin' him out, I dunno but what it serves him right. If all he's ever gonner lose is just that house an' a couple o' dogies—well, think o' Kansas, girl, an' don't forget what that old-timer up an' lost for *you!*"

Nancy Dixon let her gaze rest for a long moment on the man's face; slowly then she glanced around and eyed once more that spreading patch of crimson in the sky. For another moment or so it seemed as if she were going to wheel her horse around and gallop back the way she had come; then suddenly she spoke to her mount, flashed a grim little smile at Gault, and rode forward.

"If Farley is ever proved guilty, I'll forget all this," she said very tensely; "but if he isn't—well, there's just two things I'll never forget—Kansas Keeler and what I've seen to-night!"

Dave Gault said nothing. In silence he jogged along beside the girl. Inwardly, though, he eased his feelings with some reflections that would have alarmed her had she known them.

CHAPTER VIII.

"HANDS UP, GAULT! YORE TRAIL ENDS HERE!"

EARLY the following day half a hundred men and women from a dozen neighboring ranches trooped slowly up to a knoll on the Double X and there paid their last respects to all that was mortal of Kansas Keeler.

The brief and simple rites completed, they trooped slowly back to the house, stood around in chatting groups for a while, then gradually dispersed. Within an hour the last of the crowd had saddled up, cried adios, and hit their respective trails for home.

Many in that crowd had been in the house all night long; others had arrived just in time to pay their final tribute to a man whose death all were vowed to see avenged.

The muttered words of the night before had now given way to open talk; no longer was there any need to guess who had done for Keeler, who was behind those cattle raids which had tried the temper of the valley for the past few months.

Dave Gault had done his work very well. The very fact that Jim Farley was away from home when Gault and his posse called at his ranch was taken as proof sufficient that Farley was the one man wanted!

All up and down the valley it was

generally agreed that Farley had either slipped away for good, or was lining out for some distant town, intent on building up an alibi.

Well, it wouldn't do him any good, all were agreed on that. Once he came sneaking back to his would-be ranch—what was left of it—he'd get a sweet reception, and leave that to Gault! If he didn't come back, had gone for good—the law had a good, long reach and the men in the valley were just as sure as Gault was himself that some day, somewhere, Mister Farley would suddenly feel its strangling grip on the nape of his onery neck!

At the time the last of the mourners were leaving the Double X, Dave Gault was holding conference with his equally nefarious foreman, Ike Cramer, on the edge of his own big ranch. On a pretext easily accepted by those in attendance at the rites, he had slipped away before that solemn march to the knoll began and ridden straight to the spot where Cramer had been duly instructed to meet him.

"Well, it sure is a sweet little break, Ike—plumb perfect every way," he was saying. "That jasper bein' off his range last night sure makes it all the better. Everybody now allows he's done hidin' out, and that plumb cinches my play.

"Danged if I can guess where he's gone—he didn't show back all night; but that don't need to matter, none at all, when he does. Chances are he was off on a trip to town, an' reckon he'll ride back home to-day. Case he does, he'll get a welcome right off pronto. I've got somebody there to greet him, but yuh can bet he'll never know who!"

Cramer grinned. "Well, yuh're playin' it safe enough, Dave—that's sure," he said. "If there's anything nobody got to worry about it's what a dead man says. Now, about to-night," he continued. "That raid on the Double X still goin' through or do you think we'd better——"

"Goin' through? Sure thing!" cut in Gault. "Bumpin' off Keeler don't spoil that. I'm gonner peddle it around that Farley must 'a' planned that raid while he was away last night. Case he turns up to-day an' we get him—well, that don't need to bother us. It's just gonner mean we'll have to switch the blame on somebody else when we jump another ranch!"

Cramer nodded. "All right, boss. I've seen Morgan an' everything is jake," he said. He waited a moment, a curious smile on his lips; then added: "Here's a little tip, though, I reckon I'd better give yuh, Dave. Maybe after this raid to-night we'd better go a little easy. 'Dutch' Kane was down in town last night an' spots a cattle dick in the Palace Saloon. Gent doesn't recognize Dutch, but Dutch sure 'members him. Yuh don't suppose there's somebody in this valley what's done gone smelt a rat an' come some trick right over yuhr head?"

Dave Gault frowned. A troubled look flashed into his eyes. Then he said: "Nope, Ike, I don't think that. Ain't nobody here in the valley what don't plumb trust in me. Done reckon that dick was simply ridin' through; still——" He paused, frowned again, then went on: "Well, I guess we don't need to worry none about that snooper, not so long as Dutch has got him spotted. We'll sure take care o' him, an' that plumb proper.

"One thing is sure, Ike, that bird don't know what's comin' off to-night. After that, if that buzzard still keeps snoopin' around this valley it's gonner be his own tough luck!"

Dave Gault grinned at something in his crude jest; then briefly reviewed with Cramer certain details of the coming night's coup. There was a troubled, puzzled look on his face again, however, when a few minutes later

he wheeled his horse around and started back, alone, toward the Double X.

That bit of news about a cattle-range dick being in the valley—well, it might mean a whole lot more than he was willing to admit! Ike Cramer's gentle hint that somebody might be stacking the deck on his own was sure a card to consider. Just who the party could be, and just how much that party really knew—Dave Gault frowned more than ever and muttered to himself as he did.

Mulling things over as he rode along, however, the look on his face began to brighten and a smug smile returned to his lips. A certain decision long forming in his mind now closed with a bang. After to-night, let them flood the range with dicks; let them smell all the rats they wanted; let—Gault snickered and uttered his thoughts aloud.

"Well, I guess I'm coppin' all my bets to-night, an' that sure ends the game for me—up here, anyhow," he drawled. "That nester gent is plumb out o' the deal right now. If he don't show back at his place to-day so much the better. That's gonner make it look a whole lot more like he was mixed up in this party to-night. So far as the rest of it goes—well, if that Dixon girl ain't all mine inside another week I sure don't know the species!

"To-morrow I'll have that girl as good as broke," he continued gloatingly. "What's more, I'll have her cussin' Brother Farley for the two-faced gent what turned the trick. I'll so plumb poison her mind against that nester she'll be a-wishin' she'd pumped a slug into his onery hide herself!

"Unless I'm lots mistaken I'm ropin' that girl right pronto—plumb tamed. An' once I've got her cinched—well, I'm done through with this valley an' everybody in it! Quick as I can I'm sellin' out both ranches—her's an' mine—an' then we're droppin' plumb out o' sight. I can do it all on the q. t., an' what that girl don't know won't ever hurt her! Any time anybody wants to find us—well, they're gonner look some if they do!"

All in all, Dave Gault was feeling pretty well satisfied with himself when, shortly after noon, he cantered up to the Double X and eased out of his saddle in front of the ranch house.

The place seemed strangely deserted following the departure of the solemn crowd which had gathered there but a few short hours ago. Even the three remaining cowpokes on the ranch were not in sight; evidently, business on the Double X had resumed its course and the few hands were back at their work on the open range.

Dave Gault was grinning smugly to himself as he stalked to the ranch-house door, entered, and walked in, unannounced, upon the girl who sat alone in the office. Indifferent to the cold greeting he received, Gault sat down and promptly made himself at home.

The sad, troubled look on Nancy Dixon's face afforded him a secret satisfaction, as he spoke casually of things plainly on the minds of both—Kansas Keeler, Jim Farley, the rustlers, the chance of another raid. A sudden, hopeless shake of Nancy Dixon's head caused him to smile anew and start from his chair.

Slowly he walked toward the girl, his eyes full upon her face.

"Honey—Nancy—why do yuh do it? Why do yuh worry along like this?" he asked. "Girl, don't be foolish. Don't spoil yuhr life any more. I can make yuh happy. I——"

Nancy Dixon got to her feet. "No, Dave—never," she said very evenly. "There was a time when I might have said yes, but now——" She paused a moment, her gaze unflinching under the other's sudden scowl, then finished: "No, Mr. Gault, and let that be my final answer. Please don't——"

Something like a sneer escaped the lips of Dave Gault. He stepped a little nearer to the girl and flung an angry challenge in her face. Down in his black, vindictive heart there raged a jealousy he no longer could suppress.

"That nester—girl, yuh still ain't thinkin' sweet o' him?" he asked. "Dog-gone it, Nan, forget that snake! Ain't he done showed his fangs already? Ain't yuh believin' what yuh've seen? Why, girl, that onery hound ain't even worth a Piute's prayer. If yuh don't believe that now—well, I'm bettin' yuh will danged soon!"

Nancy Dixon didn't speak for a moment. When she did, it was with a tolerant little smile upon her lips.

"Jim Farley didn't kill Kansas Keeler, and I'm sure he'll easy prove it when he comes back home," she said. "Perhaps I should have told you, Dave, but I've got a man of my own up here investigating these cattle raids. He's been down to the spot where Keeler was slain and he's found something there that plumb let's Farley out! Just what it is he won't say yet, but——"

Dave Gault's face went pale. He shot the girl a sudden look; then broke into a jeering laugh.

"Yuh mean to say this cattle dick is gonner pin that Keeler case on somebody else than Farley?" he asked. "Don't let him fool yuh, girl; it can't be done! What about that Double X stray we found on Farley's range? How come that sneakin' coyote wasn't home last night? What about him bein' seen down in them breaks where Kansas was killed?

"Dog-gone it, girl, what more proof do yuh want than that? Too bad yuh went an' called that cattle dick in just now—right this special time," he continued reprovingly. "Like as not Farley might get wind of him an' not come back at all. Personally I've kind o' felt he was just hidin' out to build himself an alibi; but now—well, if he don't show back by the mornin', I'm startin' on his trail with a bunch o' men who'll ride him till he stops! I'd sure like to see that coyote taken alive, just so's yuh could hear the truth when we choked it out o' him; but——"

There came an interruption from the office doorway—a low, triumphant laugh. Gault spun around on his heels, his jaw sagging as he did so. There, framed in the portal, stood the missing Jim Farley, a long, blue-barreled .45 leveled in his hand.

"Up with 'em Gault—yore trail ends here!" he ordered brusquely. "I'm arrestin' yuh for the murder of Kansas Keeler an'—*drop that gun!*"

Swiftly, a drawn gun clattered to the floor at Dave Gault's feet. A moment he stood eying the semismiling Farley in baffled, murderous rage. With a forced attempt at bravado he then shook his fist in Farley's face.

"Yuh lyin' polecat—yuh sneakin' cattle thief!" he roared. "Just yuh wait until I see the sheriff. Just yuh——"

Farley laughed in open scorn. Stepping into the room, he backed the fuming Gault against the wall and kicked the fallen gun far beyond his reach. With a nod toward the startled, wondering girl he began to speak.

"Gault, I've got yuh cold. Yuhr little game is up an' yuh might's well know it now," he said. "Never mind how I got the goods on yuh; I'll tell that later to the judge. Just now all yuh needs to know is that everybody in yuhr gang is under arrest an' yore little raid for to-night is off! Ike Cramer has plumb confessed to everything; done reckon he figgers——"

Gault gave vent to a savage snarl. With lightning speed, he flashed a hidden gun from under his coat and made as if to fire. Even as he did, Farley's .45 barked once—and Gault reeled back

against the wall clutching in howling pain at a shattered paw.

There was a cold, deadly ring in Farley's voice when he spoke again.

"Gault, the only reason I didn't put that bullet through your heart," he purred, "is 'cause I'd hate to kill a skunk in this girl's home. Come another trick like that, howsomever, an' yuh won't live even long enough to swing!"

There was a momentary silence—tense, dramatic. Then came a sound that brought a fresh look of terror into Gault's pallid face. It was the sound of racing hoofs—the sound of a cavalcade coming swiftly up the trail toward the house.

Gault gave one quick glance out of the window and flung himself toward the girl in a whimpering, craven appeal.

"Nancy, Nancy, don't let them lynch me—don't let them kill me!" he cried. "It's a posse—Cramer is with them! I did it—I'm guilty! I killed Keeler, I stole yore cattle—I—Nancy, tell Farley here to let me go! Give me a chance!"

The girl recoiled before his pitiful advance. Farley flourished his gun and laughed again.

"Back against that wall, yuh hound!" he snapped. "Don't be afraid of those men comin'. That ain't no posse. It's the rangers from down to Tonca. I went for 'em the other night when I couldn't trust no one else in the valley to help me. They've just done raided yore ranch an' cleaned up all the skunks on the place .

"I beat 'em over here when Cramer said—well, all I wanted was to see yuh first an' call yuhr hand, just like I did right now! I done reckon if Nancy wants the truth, she's got it sure enough, an' that right straight from you!"

Dave Gault cringed against the wall. He tried to speak again, but couldn't. At something in the eyes of the girl he cursed silently. Jim Farley smiled once more and pointed toward the door.

"All right, Gault, traipse outside an' meet the rangers," he said. "They're fetchin' up a lot o' skunks an' we don't want 'em draggin' them in here. Quicker they rides you polecats off," he finished, "sweeter this valley is gonner be. There's just one thing I'm sorry for, Gault, an' that's this: Kansas Keeler won't be here when all you skunks are gone!"

CHAPTER IX.

A MATTER OF REWARDS.

ONE afternoon, some two weeks later, Nancy Dixon glanced up from her desk and smiled at the clean-cut, sun-bronzed young man who stood before her.

"Well, Jim, now I've got my cattle back and everything is right again, thanks to you," she said, "there's just one thing I'm going to need—a foreman. Seeing as they burned you out and seeing——"

Jim Farley met her gaze with a queer little smile.

"Oh, I ain't none worried, Nancy—not about them burnin' me out," he said. "That there little one-hoss ranch o' mine wasn't so much, anyhow. Guess yuh ain't done heard, but there was a lot o' fat rewards out for Gault an' some of his gang. I'm cuttin' in for a pretty good share an'—well, I was gonner ask if maybe I couldn't buy in——"

"Buy in?"

Jim Farley blushed at something in the smiling, teasing eyes of the girl—and the girl blushed too.

"Yeah. That is—well, I was just thinkin' as maybe you an' I we might be pards," Farley then explained. He waited for a space, the color showing deeper under the tan on his cheeks;

then grinned: "Fact is, Nancy, I—well, bein' just a foreman plumb won't do. Yuh got an actin' range boss now—'Ace' Farrell. Why not make it permanent for Ace, an' then let's trail for Tonca! There's a padre friend o' mine down there an'——"

Nancy Dixon came, laughing, from behind her desk.

"All right, partner—Ace Farrell now is foreman of the Double X," she said. "Is there anything else that you want to——"

Jim Farley caught her in his arms.

"Yeah, them rewards," he said, grinning happily. "There's a lot of 'em awaitin' me in Tonca, but the best one I'm a-claimin' right here!"

BIRDS OF THE WEST AND NORTH AMERICA

The Buzzard

THE buzzard belongs to the hawk family. These messengers of death, as Western fiction leads us to believe, are in terrifying evidence when dead bodies or carrion lie on the plains or deserts. The buzzard is an ungainly looking creature, its long neck ever craning this way and that, sighting its prey, after its ignoble fashion.

Flying overhead in circles, the buzzard alights on a little knoll or wherever it can command the best view of the surrounding country and espy some imprudent gopher who has ventured too far from home. But since the nesting place of this bird is in the trees, it is more frequently seen in and about wooded sections, or in the vicinity of wooded streams which diversify the prairies.

The nests are built at varying heights, sometimes within reach of a man's hand, and again in the tallest branch of the trees, the latter being more usual. The nests are bulky, ragged-looking structures of sticks and twigs, lined with smaller and finer ones. They are only slightly hollowed in comparison with the diameter, which may be two feet across.

Another species of the buzzard, or hawks, as it is also called, is one of a speckled-brown color, having the same hook to the end of its bill, but not the long neck; also the bill is much shorter. These buzzards depend upon berries and seeds for their food, occasionally attacking smaller birds. The male and female are very fond of each other, the male crying loudly and incessantly for his mate in the morning in case they have been separated through the night, and, finding her, he proceeds to plume himself with great care as they sit upon the branch of a tree together. They are found generally along the Atlantic coast States.

Still another of this genus is the rough-legged buzzard. It is similar in size and conformation to the above-mentioned variety, but is entirely black. It is found in the extreme East and also in the West.

The rough-legged buzzard has none of the dash and boldness of the other falcons or hawks, but preys upon field mice, frogs, lizards, and various quadrupeds, rarely attacking birds of any kind. Open fields, especially in the vicinity of water, are its favorite resorts. These buzzards are rather lethargic in their movements, flying slowly and heavily. They are partly nocturnal and resemble the owl in this respect as well as in their slow flight and habit of sitting for hours on a bough. The nest is built of sticks and is usually placed in the fork of some tall tree.

Hands Down

By Johnston McCulley

Author of "The Trail to Revenge," etc.

FLAMING beautifully in the western sky, scarlet and orange banners of sunset announced the approaching end of another day as the rider brought his mount to a stop at the crest of a hill a mile from the town of Sundale.

It was evident from the appearance of both rider and horse that they had been on the trail since morning. The animal was covered with lather and dust; the face of the rider was streaked with mud.

They were both tired, too. The breathing of the horse told that, and the manner in which he hung his head. The man straightened himself in the saddle and stretched, mopped his face with a neckerchief, and took a drink of stagnant water from his canteen. Then he dismounted, poured the remainder of the warm water into his hat, and let the horse suck it up.

"I'm hopin' right down hard that you'll get a chance to drink and eat and sleep in comfort, horse," the rider said, speaking in low tones. "But a man never c'n tell. So you'd better lap up this here warm stuff now and make the most o' it. We may have to parade out o' this here town o' Sundale mighty rapid, and, again, maybe not!"

Back in the saddle, the rider took his six-gun from its holster and examined it carefully, methodically, as though it were a piece of machinery of which a lot might be expected. He looked glum as he returned the weapon to the holster and fastened the flap, but not because of the gun's condition. The gun was as perfect as a gun could be, and ready for instant use.

He did not have the appearance of an irresponsible, rollicking cow-puncher ready for either a fight or a frolic. He was perhaps forty years of age. His figure and face were lean, the latter tanned to the color of worn leather by the sun and wind of the range. The clothing he wore was that of the trail—well-worn chaps and boots, faded over-

alls, and travel-stained shirt. His hat was discolored and battered. An observer might have deduced that this man had missed many of the good things of life.

Down the side of the hill he guided his mount, looking ahead and inspecting the town which he was slowly nearing. Sundale was a small town at the head of a valley, an outfitting post for prospectors and a trading point for many ranches of the district. For the greater part of the month, the town was dead; Sundale lived only for range pay days.

Yet to-day there was a crowd and much excitement, for the citizens of Sundale had developed enough energy to hold a stock show and fair. Into the town along every trail had poured ranchmen and the members of their families, cow-punchers of their outfits, and range tramps. A carnival company had stopped in Sundale for the day with its cheap shows. The town was making merry.

"We're a little late for the show, horse, I reckon, but maybe we c'n hunt up a show o' our own," the rider out of the north told his mount. "It sure has been a long and dusty ride across the range. I figured that we'd get here by noon, horse, but it's within an hour of sunset now."

It was nearer than that, for, as he came closer to the town, the rider saw that lamps were being lighted in many of the buildings. He could see the throng in the street, too. The stock show and fair had reached an end, but the ranch owners and their outfits would remain to take in the carnival shows. They would be riding home late at night beneath a full moon.

The rider attracted no attention as he entered the end of the town's one street in a leisurely fashion. Because of the crowd, he left the street immediately and circled behind a row of business establishments. He located a public corral and tethered his horse to a post. Then he journeyed afoot to the crowded street.

There was nothing strange in the fact that he entered a resort first of all and purchased a trail drink. He borrowed a bucket, too, and carried fresh water to his horse. Returning the bucket, he thanked the bartender who had lent it to him.

"Stranger?" the bartender asked.

"I reckon."

"Just get to town?"

"Yeah!" The new arrival did not, by word or manner, indicate that he resented questions.

"Late for the fair and races."

"Yeah! I had it figured that I could make it earlier, but I couldn't. I came over the range from the other valley. My name is Dawkins."

"But you c'n have some fun to-night at the carnival," the bartender suggested.

"I reckon."

"They've got some dandy shows."

Having taken the drink of custom, Dawkins wandered slowly around the interior of the resort, watching men drink and gamble, seeing them standing in groups exchanging range gossip. This was the sort of thing that Dawkins knew and liked. But he was a stranger in the town of Sundale, and the gossip of the local range meant nothing to him.

He sauntered out again and watched the crowds going back and forth, laughing, shouting, jostling. Down at the end of the street gasoline flares had been lighted and the carnival's ballyhoo men were starting their work. Dawkins did not go toward the carnival grounds, however. Presently he entered another resort. He bought nothing, said nothing, He acted like a man making himself familiar with the town.

From place to place he went, and finally entered the big general store, where one could purchase a paper of pins or a plow with equal ease. The store was crowded. Dawkins purchased

a package of smoking tobacco as soon as the could get the attention of one of the clerks, and manufactured a cigarette.

The store was a place for gossip, too, and here both men and women had gathered to exchange news and rumors. Dawkins walked up and down the place, smiling faintly at times, listening and watching. He heard local political arguments, the inevitable debates about the relative merits of different breeds of cattle, tales of fool tricks men had played, whispers of new betrothals expected, deaths imminent, marriages scheduled, and new babies coming.

Dawkins made his way to the door and quitted the store in an ordinary manner after surveying one of the gossipy groups. But his attitude changed when he came out into the street. Sudden energy seemed to come to him. His body straightened, he became alert, and his eyes gleamed. He cut across the street through the crowd, passed between two of the buildings, came to the corral, and got his horse.

Swinging into the saddle, he rode to the end of the street away from the carnival, crossed it where the crowd was thinner, and got behind the row of buildings on the other side. He dismounted at the rear of the big general store. There was a vacant lot beside the store buiding, and Dawkins led his horse along the side of the structure until he came to an open window.

He peered inside to find that the scene was as he had left it. Just outside the streak of light that came through the window he halted the horse and trailed the reins. Then he went on along the side of the building toward the street.

In a dark spot, he reached down and unfastened the flap of his holster, and made certain that it was hanging in the position that he most approved. A little later he was entering the store again, his manner slightly apologetic for being in the way, his shoulders hunched forward once more, the gleam gone from his eyes.

Ed Briley had been a stranger to Sundale at dawn that morning, but he was not now. He had spent the day in getting acquainted. He had come across the range of hills to the stock show and fair, he had announced, and to see how the town of Sundale was behaving itself.

Ed Briley was a man of middle age, short and squat. His countenance betrayed the fact that he was neither trustworthy nor kind. But he had been a lavish host throughout the day, and a group of men was gathered around him.

"Everybody is callin' the feller 'Five-spot,'" Ed Briley explained to those who listened. "He made his first showin' about three weeks ago, and he sure is a demon."

"And how?" asked Deputy Sheriff Sam Radder.

"He went into a saloon at Cactusville and walked right up to Bill Lanton. He cussed him out and dared him to draw. Bill went for his gun, and this hombre got him between the eyes before he could draw. I saw it, and let me say, men, that he sure has speed with a gun."

"That's ordinary enough," Sam Radder said.

"Yeah! But the hombre was masked.

"Masked?" half a dozen cried.

"Had a black handkerchief over his face, with holes cut for the eyes. You couldn't tell a thing from his clothes—just like any rider might wear. He held off the gang after he had shot Bill, and then he tossed a playin' card on Bill's body. It was the five o' spades, and one o' the spots was crossed off with a pencil."

"That's funny," Deputy Sheriff Sam Radder commented. "What had this Bill man been doin'?"

"Nobody could explain it," Ed Briley replied. "He sure and certain picked that quarrel with Bill. And three days later he walked around the corner of a

buildin' just at dusk, with that handkerchief mask over his face, and said a few things to Walt Binson. Walt went for his gun. The masked man got him, jumped into a saddle, and went away from there. The boys couldn't catch him. And he dropped a five o' spades with two o' the spots scratched off."

"That jasper," the deputy sheriff declared, "is around settlin' accounts. He's sure and certain squarin' his books. Anybody guess why he went after this here Walt Binson?"

"Nope! And the third happened a week later. That got folks stirred up. He met Hank Larson out on the trail. There was an old man ridin' with Hank. The masked hombre said somethin' to Hank, but the other jasper couldn't hear it. Hank went for his gun, and the masked man beat him to it. He held off the old man and dropped one o' his cards—with three spots scratched off."

"Mighty good thing for you folks that he didn't start in with a ten-spot instead o' a five-spot," the deputy sheriff commented. "Is that all, Briley?"

"Nope! He got his fourth man three days ago. Went right into the general store and taunted him into a fight. Got him, and left a card with four spots scratched off."

"That means," Sam Radder said, "that he's got one man left to get."

"I reckon," Ed Briley replied. "Everybody over our way got to lookin' at all strangers. But what good did that do? The danged place is full o' strangers on account o' the rumors that there's been a gold strike up in the hills. There are a couple o' hundred gents dressed like him. And he always worked at night or dusk except that once, and made an easy get-away."

"Settlin' accounts," said the deputy sheriff. "If I was the fifth man, I'd sure practice shootin' and be on guard continual."

"He's a murderin' hound!" Ed Briley declared. "That's all he is, a murderin' hound! He didn't have any reason for shootin' them four men."

"I reckon there must have been some reason," Radder said. "A feller don't go around wearin' a mask and shootin' down citizens and leavin' five-spots for nothin'."

"Better men never lived than them men he shot!" Ed Briley said. "They was decent citizens!"

A voice at his elbow corrected him. "They were black-hearted murderers!" it said.

Ed Briley turned quickly, a look of surprise on his face. The others turned also.

"What do you know about it?" Briley demanded.

"My name's Dawkins. I know a lot about it."

"You know this here Fivespot?"

"I sure and certain do!"

"Yeah? Maybe you're a friend o' his?"

"I am!" Dawkins declared. "I am a friend o' his, and men want to talk easy about him when I am around."

"Oh, yeah? Maybe this here gent, who's a deputy sheriff, would be interested in you," Briley said.

"Maybe, and maybe not. You won't find my picture on any reward notice," Dawkins told him, "if that's what you mean. I just said that the man you call Fivespot is a friend o' mine, and I don't like to hear him talked about!"

"You reckon that he's a nice, peaceable citizen, huh?" Ed Briley sneered. "Goin' around shootin' up good men and——"

"Executin' murderers, you mean!" Dawkins put in. "I know all about it, I said."

"Well, suppose you tell us, then," the deputy sheriff suggested. "We've heard one side o' the story."

"I'm willin'," Dawkins replied. "Over the hills there was a man named Seth Marden. He wasn't right down well,

and he had a wife and a couple o' little kids. He was tryin' to farm him a piece o' land."

"Seems to me I've heard the name," said Radder.

"Maybe you have," Dawkins continued. "Seth Marden was just tryin' to get along and make a livin' for his family, and I reckon that he had a tough time o' it. There was a little rustlin' in that neighborhood, and nobody seemed able to locate the rustlers. The Cattlemen's Association sent one o' their detectives out there, and he went back in disgust. And the rustlin' went right on."

"Yeah! We worked on that case in this county," the deputy sheriff put in.

"Some skunk over there got the idea that Seth Marden was doin' the rustlin'. I don't know why, unless because he was a poor man strugglin' to get along. They didn't investigate much. But one night five gents rode up to Seth's house and pulled him out o' bed, took him to a tree, and made him stretch rope. His wife and kids watched it."

"Well, if he was a rustler——" Sam Radder began.

"But he wasn't. They never had any evidence and didn't go around lookin' for any. They just took it for granted. You know how some ranch owners hate the small farmers. They strung him up. And four days later the real rustlers were caught!"

"Heavenly days!" exclaimed the deputy sheriff.

"Caught red-handed and hanged. And the five gents who had made Seth Marden stretch rope sent word to his widow that they had made a mistake and were sorry. They even offered to help her along if she'd move into town and sew for a livin', or somethin' like that. Made a mistake! Robbed a woman of her man and them kids o' their father, and were sorry because it was a mistake! Wasn't them men murderers?"

"I'd call 'em that!" said Deputy Sheriff Sam Radder.

"All right! The man you're callin' Fivespot is the brother o' Seth Marden's widow. He came to this country from Texas to square accounts. I know him well, gents. He ain't a murderer. He deals out justice. The law won't touch them fellers because they are too powerful over there."

"Wearin' a mask and shootin' good men——" Ed Briley put in.

"He knew the five, but they didn't know him. He wore a mask so he couldn't be recognized and the ones remainin' alive do for him before his work was done."

"Maybe you and a few other stranges are here helpin' him," Briley suggested.

"I reckon that he don't need any help," Dawkins replied. "He's got four o' the black-hearted murderers, and he'll get the fifth when he gets around to it—and leave his card with all the spots scratched off, likely."

"Every stranger ought to be investigated!" Briley cried. "Are we gents goin' to stand idle while this feller prowls around and picks off another good man?"

"What interest have you got in it?" Dawkins demanded.

"Them four as were killed were friends o' mine," Ed Briley replied. "I've known 'em for years. Everybody over the hills knew 'em. That's the interest I've got!"

"And the man you call Fivespot is a friend o' mine, and that's the interest I've got!" Dawkins retorted.

"I wouldn't go around braggin' about bein' the close friend o' such a murderer!"

"And I'm resentin' it when anybody calls him a murderer!" Dawkins replied hotly. "He's dealin' out justice to the five skunks who strung up an innocent man, a sick man, and took him away from the family as needed him. Can

you blame the widow's brother if he comes here and plays a hand?"

"I can, and I do!" Ed Briley cried. "He ought to be shot down like a dog, and his friends run out o' the country."

"Now you're makin' it personal," Dawkins warned. "I said that I was one o' his friends."

"That ain't makin' me change my remark," Briley declared.

"You've got a big mouth, ain't you?" Dawkins said. "What kind of a man are you to stand up for murderers? Maybe you'd do the same as they did."

"Yeah! Maybe I would if I thought a man was a rustler."

"Wouldn't even bother about evidence? I'm right down sure that you don't rank very high with me!"

"Who cares? Who are you—a range tramp? On the run from some sheriff, maybe!"

"You're talkin' pretty loud!" Dawkins warned. "I wonder if you're the kind o' hombre who's always talkin' and never backs up his talk?"

Those who had been listening were drawing back. Deputy Sheriff Sam Radder did not retreat, however.

"Easy, gents!" the deputy said.

"There ain't anything to it," Dawkins declared. "I'm just sayin' that the man you call Fivespot is doin' right, and that the men he's got and the fifth one he's after were murderers!"

"You're a liar!" Ed Briley shouted.

The eyes of Dawkins glittered suddenly, and he bent forward a trifle. His hands were hanging loosely at his sides. It had grown quiet in the store; women and children had been hurried toward the front door and the street, and men were hanging back. The deputy commenced another warning.

But neither Dawkins nor Ed Briley gave the deputy any attention. They were looking straight into each other's eyes.

"You called me a liar!" Dawkins said in a tense voice.

"What of it?" Ed Briley undoubtedly expected the other to draw and hoped to anticipate the draw by the fraction of a second.

"How could you know?" Dawkins drawled. "You don't know the truth, wasn't ever acquainted with it, so how could you know whether a man was a liar or not? You're just a loud-mouthed nothin'!"

There was a moment of tense quiet. Then Ed Briley gave a roar of rage, lurched to one side quickly, and went for his gun. Dawkins, without changing his position went for his weapon also. The two guns roared as one.

A window crashed as Ed Briley's bullet went through it. Briley swayed and dropped to the floor, turned over part way, rolled back, and was still.

Dawkins still clutched the gun, though his arm had dropped to his side. He looked around at them, last of all at the deputy sheriff.

"Well, gents?" Dawkins asked.

"He went for his gun first, mister," the deputy replied. "You're both strangers in Sundale. I reckon that we won't bother you any."

"Thanks!" Dawkins said.

He returned his gun to its holster, bowed slightly, and turned away. His left hand strayed to the left breast pocket of his shirt, took something therefrom, and tossed it back, upon the body of Ed Briley.

As Dawkins vaulted through the window and walked swiftly to where his horse was standing, Deputy Sheriff Sam Radder darted forward and picked up what Dawkins had tossed.

It was a fivespot of spades—and all fivespots had been crossed off with a pencil.

Shorty Picks up the Scent

By Ray Humphreys

Author of "Deep Down," etc.

CHAPTER I.

TRAGEDY AT BEAR LAKE.

THE cold cabin was in frightful disarray. Clothing, cooking utensils, papers, pieces of cord wood, fragments of an old mattress—all were scattered, helter-skelter. Only in the very middle of the floor was a spot that could be called clear. And there, with the débris on all sides of him, sprawled old Jacques Bolquet, the hermit of Bear Lake.

Jacques was dead. His body was frozen.

Four men, all in heavy overcoats, stood at the cabin door and gaped in on that scene of havoc.

I didn't touch him——

"Thar, jus' as I told yuh!" piped up Eddie Owens, one of the men in the doorway. "That's the way I sees him early this mawnin', gents, as I pushes open the door jus' as we did now—I knowed right away he was dead."

"Yes, yuh could see that plain enough," conceded Sheriff Joe Cook, nodding sadly. "Pore ol' Jacques—done to death—an' then his shanty ransacked fer the treasure they thought he had; I often warned him, las' few years."

The four men stepped into the room—gingerly.

"Joe, yuh better step over thar an' look him over," suggested the sheriff, addressing Joe McMeel, the coroner of Monte Vista. "See what they did to him—afore we begin to mill around an' destroy what clews they may be."

"Shorty" McKay, the deputy sheriff, stooped and picked up a piece of stained cord wood. He held it up grimly.

"Thar's what happened to pore ol' Jacques," he said, "an' thar ain't no finger prints on it, either."

"Yes," said Coroner McMeel, straightening up after a hurried examination of the corpse, "they bashed in his haid with some instrument—that piece o' wood, probably, an'——"

"How long would you say he's been dead, Joe?"

"I dunno—looks like two-three days, at least!"

"I saw him Saturday," spoke up Eddie Owens again. "I brought him up some medicine from the drug store, an' he was feelin' porely then—that was Saturday—an' I tol' him ef he wasn't down to the Healey & Owens Pharmacy by noon, Thursday—that was yesterday—I'd bring him up some more medicine—an' this mawnin', when I pushed open the door——"

Eddie paused and shuddered. He closed his eyes.

"Waal," said the sheriff, "it's plain robbery, that's all—an' a brutal murder. Shorty, yuh an' McMeel kinda sort over this trash here—we might find something to give us a start—an' yuh, Eddie Owens, ef yuh keep on blubberin' like that, supposin' yuh go outside whar yuh won't git on strong men's nerves—I kain't concentrate with that goin' on."

Eddie blew his nose violently into his red handkerchief.

"Why, I saw him Saturday!" he blurted brokenly, "an' he says 'Hello thar, Eddie!' to me jus' as chirper as a sparrer, an' now—an' now—he's daid—cold daid."

"Go on outside, Ed—please!" said McMeel.

"He was a swell feller, kind an' gentle," said Eddie. "He wouldn't harm a fly—wouldn't shoot game, even, because he was a friend o' every bird an' chipmonk an' rabbit."

They put Eddie outside then, forcibly, and started a systematic search of the disrupted cabin. The assailant or assailants of poor old Jacques Bolquet had torn everything to pieces in a mad search for gold. They had yanked the old man's bed to pieces. The pockets of all the old clothes were turned inside out; linings were ripped. The drawers had been jerked out of the old-fashioned bureau, and their contents dumped on the floor. All of old Jacques' pitifully meager treasures had been scattered about with no gentle hand. Apparently, the intruder or intruders had worked with haste, evidently fearing discovery. The killing and robbery—if there had been any robbery—must have occurred during the daytime, for old Jacques was fully clothed. And, while the search of the cabin had been made quickly, no doubt, still it had been thorough. Even the floor planking had been pried up in places.

But that was all. There was nothing to be found to indicate whether the robber or robbers had found the gold they sought, the fortune that they believed—as everybody in the district believed—old Jacques had secreted about his cabin. If there had been buried treasure, then the man or men must have found it, for they had apparently overlooked no bets. But they left no clews, it seemed. No finger prints, no shoe prints. Nothing to give the officers the slightest aid in trailing their man.

"Some wanderin' bums," suggested Coroner McMeel.

"No," said Sheriff Cook, "I don't think so—we don't have bums up here around Bear Lake, Joe, so danged far from a railroad; still, yuh might be right."

"They even looked through the ol' man's books, sheriff."

"Yes—French books," snorted the sheriff; "that was ol' Jacques fer yuh, McMeel—he never forgot he was French!"

Shorty McKay, meanwhile, had been rummaging through the litter on the floor in front of the old bureau. He picked up a little leather-covered box, some six inches long, four inches wide, three or four inches deep. He took off the cover. Four tiny red-leather

volumes reposed therein. Each book bore its title at the top, and below the name of a Paris firm.

Shorty pried one of the little volumes out.

"E-t-e Rose," he pronounced, slowly. "I never could talk French, but this shore looks——"

Sheriff Cook straightened up.

"What's that, Shorty?"

The sheriff stepped over and picked up the little book Shorty held in his hand. He snorted contemptuously.

"Huh—that's only another French book, Shorty; why raise a rumpus over it—it don't help none!"

"Ef I could read French!" said Shorty.

"Thar wouldn't be no account o' this killin' in all the French books yuh could read in a century, yuh dumb nut!" exploded the sheriff. "Chuck that stuff aside an' git busy."

Shorty made as if to obey. He turned his back on the sheriff, however, as soon as the sheriff had moved aside, and examined the little book more closely. He grunted. He examined the other three little volumes he had found in the box. He muttered to himself. Then he closed the box carefully, but he slipped the volume he had taken out first into his overcoat pocket. The coroner and the sheriff both missed that move. Shorty replaced the leather-covered box on the bureau.

An hour later the three men gave up the search for telltale clews. They called Eddie Owens in from outside and they wrapped what was left of poor old Jacques in a blanket. They bound the body around with a cord or two. Then they placed it on another blanket, and with a man at each corner of the makeshift stretcher, they started down the trail for Monte Vista, slightly over four miles to the west.

Eddie still blubbered. The other three were silent.

CHAPTER II.

A WARPED BRAIN—SURELY.

THE killing of old Jacques Bolquet became a sensation immediately. Hardly had the four trudging men arrived in town with their gruesome burden than the countryside flamed with the news. It caused tremendous excitement. Old Jacques had been a hermit, but he had been popular. He had had no enemies. He had boasted many friends—and these raised their voices now.

"Get the fellers that kilt 'pore ol' Jacques!"

"String 'em up to the nearest cottonwood!"

"Give 'em what they gave ol' Jacques!"

Indignation ran at white heat. The inquest next day was a scene of turmoil. The funeral, a day later, was another occasion for a demonstration. There was talk of vigilance committees, night riders, posses, and rewards—and all this made Sheriff Joe Cook uneasy, because he had no idea who killed Bolquet and no idea where to start to look for the murderer.

"Thar's jus' one thing," the sheriff confided to Shorty on the day of the funeral; "ef that murderer actually found a horde o' gold in the ol' cabin, he'll start to spend it—watch an' see—an' then we'll nab him; but ef he didn't find it——"

Sheriff Cook shook his head hopelessly.

It was Eddie Owens, however, who added the final straw to the sheriff's load of grief. Eddie came panting into the sheriff's office the morning after the hermit's funeral, whooping as if a brace of murderers were right at his heels.

"Sheriff—sheriff!"

"Yes, Eddie, what in heck?"

"Oh, sheriff—they—they've——"

"What—what is it, Eddie?"

"They've burned down ol' Jacques' cabin!"

"Who has?"

"I dunno—they!"

It was true. Somebody had burned down the hermit's cabin—and had done a fine job of destruction. Eddie Owens, it appeared, had gone to the cabin the morning after Jacques' funeral to see that everything was in order there, seeing that Coroner McMeel had appointed Eddie, as Jacques' best friend, to look after the old man's belongings. But when Eddie reached Bear Lake he saw no cabin. Only blackened ruins, charred logs, twisted iron bed posts, a shattered stove. Some one had applied a match, and the flames had finished the job.

That was another sensation for Monte Vista. And another howl for revenge, retaliation, justice, went up from five hundred throats. Sheriff Cook began to run around in circles, like a chicken with its head off. But he didn't know where to start. He paged all the merchants in town, asking them to keep a sharp watch for gold coins, or for any one spending an unusually large amount of cash. They all promised to watch. But that ended that. Meanwhile, the sheriff had had Shorty communicating with all near-by towns, spreading the tip to all their merchants to watch for gold coins or large sums.

"Shorty!" exclaimed Sheriff Cook, woefully, "we've sure overlooked a bet! Whoever burned ol' Jacques' cabin was the bird or birds who done the killin' an' robbin', an' they was afraid they had left some incriminatin' marks around thar."

"Waal, we looked!" said Shorty, quietly. Shorty, for some reason or other, seemed to have lost interest in the murder investigation. Sheriff Cook had noticed this and wondered, for his deputy was usually keen on ferreting out such cases. But this time Shorty appeared indifferent—just when everything, including his own job as deputy and Sheriff Cook's re-election, depended on a solution of the Jacques Bolquet murder and the capture of the guilty parties! Apparently Shorty wasn't worrying much, however.

"Yes, we looked through that cabin," admitted the sheriff, after a pause, during which he had looked keenly at Shorty, "an' we didn't find nuthin'—but we must have overlooked something."

"They's an ol' adage among crooks," said Shorty, raising his eyes from the book he was reading, "that a guilty criminal always returns to the dog-gone scene o' his crime. Waal, that bird may have returned to the cabin jus' outta curiosity an' then couldn't resist the temptation o' puttin' a match to her."

The sheriff grunted dismally.

"That might be it, Shorty!"

"Sure it might," said Shorty, thumbing the pages of his book eagerly, "but I don't figger we're gonna land that hombre so dern easy, boss—no, sir! It's one chance in a thousand, seems to me, that we ever gets him—it'll take some dog-gone fancy sleuthin' to turn the trick, boss; that's my honest opinion."

Sheriff Cook opened his mouth angrily, and then he closed it again without voicing the hot words he had meant to say. What was the use of getting in a big argument with his deputy so early in the game? Shorty and his fancy sleuthing! Shorty was always like that, the sheriff recollected, bitterly—passing up the obvious, often, to get at a fact by some roundabout method.

"It seems to me," said Sheriff Cook, slowly, trying to hold his growing disgust under cover of smooth tones, "that we might have more'n one chance in a thousand, Shorty, ef yuh showed a little more pep in this investigation.

Gosh knows I kain't be everywhars at once, when I gotta hang fairly close to the office to attend to routine matters; but yuh—yuh could be snoopin' around town quite a bit instead o' buryin' yuhr nose in that book."

Shorty looked up innocently.

"Snoopin' fer what, boss?"

"Fer the murderer, o' course—fer clews!"

"Waal, what clews?"

"Why, about the only ones we kin hope to get," exploded the old sheriff, "an' yuh know what they are—some gink spendin' lavishly o' gold coins or flashin' a big roll o' dough, which might indicate he was involved in the lootin' o' Jacques' place."

Shorty sighed and shook his head wearily.

"No use in that, boss."

"Why not, no use in that?"

"Because—because the feller or fellers that killed ol' Jacques Bolquet didn't get no big money fer their pains."

The sheriff stared at Shorty with startled eyes.

"How yuh figger that, Shorty?"

"Oh, I plumb fergot to tell yuh, boss," said Shorty, marking his place in the book he was reading with a slip of paper, and closing the volume resignedly, "I plumb fergot—but one of the fust pieces o' sleuthin' I did right after the killin' was to go to the banks—both o' 'em—an' warn them about watchin' fer gold coins or big wads o' ol' musty bills—an' I finds out at the City National that ol' Jacques Bolquet wasn't the fool most folks took him fer, after all—he was hidin' his dough like no squirrel buryin' nuts around that ol' cabin—he banked it."

"He had money in the City National?"

"Yes—about twenty-two thousand bucks."

"Whew!" exclaimed the sheriff, in astonishment. "Waal, the sly ol' fox! An' yet he wasn't so sly, after all, lettin' folks think he had it hid in his cabin, an' that he was scared o' banks—that idear cost him his life anyhow."

"So," said Shorty, getting up, "I don't think we stand no chance o' ketchin' a suspect spendin' a lotta Jacques' dough."

"No," said the sheriff, hopelessly, "I guess we don't!"

But after Shorty had sauntered out, whistling, the sheriff pounced on the big book Shorty had been reading and had left behind him on the desk. The old Sheriff's eyebrows arched in surprise, and his mustache seemed to curl in sudden scorn.

"A French dictionary!" he exploded, hotly, "a French dictionary—kin yuh feature that? The blamed galoot skimmmed through them French books pore ol' Jacques had in his cabin, an' mebbe liked the pictures in 'em an' made up his mind to study French! That's all that murder means to him—an inspiration to go to the library an' git a French dictionary! The crazy, brainless idjut!"

The sheriff had the temptation to toss the book into the office stove, but he resisted that impulse. After all, the book was community property. He had no right to destroy it.

"That—that Shorty sure has a warped brain—yes, sir!" went on Sheriff Cook. "A brain that rattles in his haid when he walks like a pinto bean in a bottle. Still——"

The sheriff sunk his head in his hands.

"Still, gotta hand it to Shorty fer one thing—he found out we was barkin' up the wrong tree on tryin' to trace the murderer through the spendin' o' that dough—the killer never got no dough, er at least not enough to count—so we kain't—kain't——"

The old man was silent for a time. Then he got up and walked to the window and looked out on the sunny street

of Monte Vista, glittering in the early Colorado sunshine.

"Waal," he mused, "this is a wonderful country—great climate, fine soil, good rainfall—I kin always go back to farmin'!"

CHAPTER III.

SOME HEAVY THINKING.

THE community arose in loud protest as the days dragged by, and demanded that the murderer or murderers of Jacques Bolquet be brought to time. There was a mass meeting in Spruce Hall, and Sheriff Cook attended, by request, and had to sit and listen to fourteen different amateur orators harangue the crowd on the wonderful character of the poor, dead hermit. And each speaker wound up his eloquent masterpiece something like this, turning to face the perspiring, fidgeting sheriff:

"An' so we appeal to yuh, Sheriff Cook, to exert yuhr uttermost efforts to run down, capture, and bring to a belated but sure justice the brutal slayer who struck pore ol' Jacques Bolquet down in cold blood, killin' him without a chance fer his life, away out thar in his isolated cabin."

It came the sheriff's turn to talk, and he did—briefly.

"I'm doin' all I kin do, folks," he said, slowly—and that was the truth—"I'm sure on the trail o' that killer."

And the sheriff was on the trail, to the best of his ability. He had hardly slept a wink since the crime. He had begun to wear a harried, haunted look. He had thought and thought until his weary brain had seemed to be on fire. He had tried to figure out every possible angle to the strange murder mystery. He had besought the aid of sheriffs in all neighboring bailiwicks, asking their help and advice. He had arrested and held in jail more than a score of suspicious characters around Monte Vista—floaters, tramps, idlers generally—but he had found no leads there. He had tried to go back into the history of poor old Jacques himself, to ascertain if the aged hermit had ever made any enemies who might have waited patiently to do him to death.

But there seemed to be absolutely nothing. Old Jacques had once been a prosperous San Luis Valley farmer. He had sold out and retired in early middle age and gone to live in solitude at Bear Lake. Why, nobody knew. But none of the old-timers who had known Jacques intimately had ever heard that he had had any differences with any one. The City National Bank explained that the money Jacques had on deposit there was in a savings account, and that it was the proceeds of the sale of his farm. He had lived on the interest. He had asked the bank to hold his account confidential, as he didn't want to be bothered by agents, investment men and the like. No, as far as any one knew, old Jacques had no relatives.

As a last resort, the sheriff took to skulking around Bear Lake, on the vain hope that the murderer might return to the scene of the burned cabin. But that was a hopeless task, too. No one came in the long week the sheriff snooped about there. The sheriff had early sent the piece of cord-wood that had been used to kill the old hermit to the Denver police department for microscopic examination. The identification bureau of that department had sent back word that the stain on the piece of wood was indeed human blood, but that no finger prints showed on the wood. That was that. Balked at every turn, without a single, solitary clew to go on, the sheriff took to long brooding, and day after day he was forced to assume a faked smile of hope as various Monte Vistians questioned him.

"Waal, sheriff, how yuh comin' on pore Jacques' case?"

"I'm workin' day an' night on it."

"Good—got a line on the killer yet?"

"Waal, partly, just partly, but——"

"Yuh sure got to land that bird, sheriff."

"Sure will—we'll land him sure enough."

It was that way every day. The board of county commissioners, too, had taken to jacking up the poor old sheriff every few days. The commissioners seemed to think Sheriff Cook was asleep on the job. Asleep on the job! Why, he hadn't slept for weeks now, from worrying! Anybody could see that from looking at him. His face was sad and wistful; his eyes had lost their old fire; his shoulders were bent more than ever now. He was the picture of despair.

"Shorty, why in heck don't yuh help me outta this hole?" the sheriff groaned, periodically, and the answer was always the same.

"I got both ears an' both eyes open, boss," Shorty would retort, vaguely. "I ain't overlookin' nuthin'. I've done everything yuh've asked me to do. I've interviewed all the railroaders about tramps comin' an' goin' around the time o' the murder; I took them Alamosa bloodhounds an' tried to track on a cold trail; I wrote all the Bolquets in the Denver city directory, tryin' to turn up a relative; I visited every ranch house within a radius o' five miles o' Bear Lake, an' nobody had seen a thing mysterious; I read sign fer hoof marks all over that territory; I've done every solitary thing yuh tol' me to do, on the chance we could line something up, an' thar hasn't been a thing develop worth while."

The sheriff shrugged and sighed.

"Waal, haven't yuh any idears o' yuhr own, Shorty?"

"I has—I been studyin' French, an' readin' up all the detective books at the Monte Vista library——"

"Shucks!"

"Waal, yuh never kin tell," said Shorty—but the sheriff knew by the tone of Shorty's dismal voice that the deputy had nothing very tangible to work on—"yuh never kin tell when yuh may stumble onto a clew—so the detective books always say."

"To heck with them!" grunted the sheriff, shuffling about the office nervously, but he stopped suddenly and began to sniff the air suspiciously.

"Shorty, yuh been to the barber shop?"

"Nope!"

"Huh—what's that sweet stuff I smells, then?"

Shorty flushed uncomfortably.

"Perfume!" he said, weakly.

"Perfume!" echoed the sheriff. "On—on yuh?"

"Ah—yes!"

"What's the idear o' that?"

"Waal," said Shorty, miserably, "I've been smokin' too many cigarettes, I figger; that odor o' terbaccer—waal, folks has been hintin' about it—complainin—that is—an'——"

"Folks!" thundered Sheriff Cook. "What folks? Has everybody took to criticizin' this office since the Jacques murder? They'll be complainin' about my chewin' terbaccer next, I suppose! What folks has had the blasted nerve to tell yuh about terbaccer odors?"

"Waal—several!"

"But who—who?"

"Waal, Miss Rosa Roach has, fer one!"

"Miss Rosa Roach!" bellowed the sheriff. "What has she got to say about what yuh smoke, or how?"

"I been playin' around her lately," admitted Shorty, sadly. "I might as waal tell yuh, boss, that I'm seriously considerin' matrimony—yep, figger I should get married, an'——"

"Who were these other folks as criticized yuh?" asked the sheriff, suspiciously. No wonder Shorty had acted like he had been in a stupor. He was

in love, the poor boob! No doubt about it.

"Waal, Miss Nina Kelley, fer one."

"Who else?"

"Miss Dorothy Mattle, fer another."

"Who else?"

"Miss—Miss Ruth McGuire, I guess."

"Holy smoke!" exploded the sheriff, angrily. "No wonder yuh been goin' around like a calf ever since this Jacques murder—an' fer weeks before, I expect, although I never noticed it then. Yuh're in love, eh? A reasonable, usta-be sensible feller like yuh don't know when yuh're waal off, eh? An' thinkin' o' matrimony—with a harem? Yuh been courtin' all the young wimmen in Monte Vista, yuh idjut? An' dollin' yuhrself up like a sheik—pourin' a lot o' cheap perfume on yuhrself."

"It ain't cheap," protested Shorty. "I had to send to New York fer it, an' it costs real money, too, an' if I hadn't——"

Sheriff Cook threw back his head and laughed, and laughed, and laughed until the tears rolled from his eyes. It was the first time he had laughed in weeks, and it was not a laugh of mirth at all. It was sarcastic—humiliating—intimidating—and Shorty shivered as he heard it peal. But Shorty had gone too far to retreat now. He made up his mind to unburden his soul a bit more, now that things were already unpleasant. He waited, respectfully, until the old sheriff paused for breath, and then he spoke up—sharply.

"I guess I oughter tell yuh now, boss," said Shorty, clearly and distinctly, "that I'm—waal, yuh kain't break inter the younger set o' society in Monte Vista very easy after yuh've been a ol' mossback an' woman-hater like I've been fer so long, unless yuh kinda indicate that yuh've come to life at last, realized that yuh was never made to live yuhr life alone, and that love is something after all, an' that yuh want to be sociable, an'—an'——"

"Yes, go on!"

"Waal, I'm throwin' a big dance over to Spruce Hall to-morrow night, sheriff—fer the young folks. I'd like to have yuh come—yuh an' the missus—thar'll be dancin'—an' ice cream—an' good music—I hired Horace Stewart's three-piece orchestra."

The sheriff blinked, and Shorty laughed this time. An embarrassed sort of laugh, that was as mirthless as the sheriff's had been. But the sheriff didn't laugh. He scowled darkly.

"Yuh brainless idjut!" he exclaimed. "Throwin' a dance to make us look ridiculous while we are both supposed to be workin' head over heels on that danged Jacques Bolquet case."

Shorty tried to look cheerful.

"All work an' no play makes a feller dull," he mentioned.

"All play an' no work, yuh mean!" exploded the sheriff, wildly. "Why, I see it all now—that whiff o' that sweet perfume yuh bathe in has woke me up finally. Yuh been layin' down on the job, Shorty, leavin' all the work to me! I never did see a feller that was crazy in love to be worth a whoop otherwise. Why, why, dog-gone it, yuh kain't give no dance now, yuh boob!"

"Invitations are out," said Shorty, significantly.

"Makes no difference; thar ain't gonna be no shindig——"

"Yes, thar is!"

"Then no deputy o' mine is gonna to stage it," said the sheriff, boiling with rage. "Either yuh call off that dance, or else yuh quit here; I'm in bad enough over this unsolved murder case without appearin' to be aidin' in stagin' a fiesta."

Shorty laughed—a short, ugly laugh.

"Here's my badge," he said, swiftly. "I'm through now!"

And he got up and stalked out of the office without another word.

CHAPTER IV.

MUSIC—A NEW DEPUTY.

THE dance at Spruce Hall was a gorgeous affair. The festive decorations, consisting of long streamers of colored tissue paper put up by Shorty himself, gave the old hall a holiday color. The three-piece orchestra presided over by Horace Stewart never turned out better music than it did that evening—and all the young folks in Monte Vista were there—and many who were not so young!

And Shorty, ex-deputy sheriff, resplendent in a new store suit, was the life of the whole party. He flitted around like a butterfly, a wide smile spread across his tanned, boyish face, and his eyes glowing as he saw and sought first one pretty girl and then another. He was an ideal host, and a lot of folks had to remark that his sudden resignation as deputy sheriff wasn't worrying him very much, apparently. A few asked him about it. Coroner Joe McMeel, who had never missed a dance in Monte Vista in thirty years, was one of those who grew personal.

"Hear yuh quit Cook," said McMeel, as he edged up to Shorty just after Shorty had had a particularly enjoyable dance with Miss Belle Moore, a pretty, black-eyed, raven-haired girl. "What was the idear o' doin' that so sudden, Shorty?"

"Oh, we jus' had an argument!" remarked Shorty, still smiling after Miss Moore, and the coroner saw her turn and give Shorty a bewitching smile over one fair shoulder.

"Argument over—over the Jacques murder?" persisted the coroner, with canny insight, it seemed to Shorty.

"Waal, yes an' no," said Shorty, still all eyes for the pretty Miss Moore. "It was that—kinda; yuh see, I decided to throw this big dance, an' the sheriff he—he forbid it!"

"Why?"

"He don't like dancin'," said Shorty, maliciously, for he knew that would strike home to McMeel, "says it's disgraceful."

"Disgraceful!" echoed the astounded coroner, in protest. "That's what's wrong with that ol' fossil—Cook! He ain't been out on a dance floor more'n twice in his life, as far as I kin recollect. Disgraceful, eh? Ef he was a little more human he'd git further along on his work! He's all dried up—his brain is evaporated—his heart is mummified."

The music started up, and Shorty looked around regally for his next-dance partner. But Coroner McMeel clutched Shorty's arm and detained him for a moment.

"Why did yuh throw this dance, son?"

"I'm tired o' bein' a ol' fossil myself," said Shorty, impatiently. "I want to enjoy life—mebbe pick out a pretty gal."

Coroner McMeel laughed quietly.

"In love, eh?" he exclaimed. "Waal, I'm glad o' it—love an' dancin' are wonderful things; an' yuh seem to be doin' pretty wall, too—with that Miss Moore now, fer instance. An', say, Shorty, do yuh know who Sheriff Cook appointed deputy in yuhr place this afternoon—do yuh now—do yuh?"

"I ain't heard," said Shorty, trying to break away. No one had yet approached the blushing Miss Moore, where she stood at the far side of the hall. Shorty meant to dance with her again. He had danced with her twice, but—well, he had danced with a number of other girls twice that evening, too. In fact, he hadn't missed many of them so far.

"Waal," drawled the coroner, watching Shorty keenly, "Cook up an' appointed Bert Sidlo to take yuhr place, Shorty."

Shorty jumped as if he had heard a rattlesnake.

"Bert Sidlo?"

"Yep! Knowed that would git a raise out o' yuh, Shorty," gloated McMeel. "It was sure a surprise to everybody as has heard. I thought mebbe yuh knowed—seein' as how yuh was sure monopolizin' Belle Moore here t'-night—an' Belle's—waal, every one figgered she was Bert's gal."

Shorty was really surprised. He glared at McMeel in unbelief for a full minute. Then he burst out:

"So, that's why Bert ain't here tonight, eh?"

"Reckon so," said McMeel, grinning. "No sooner he was appointed than him an' Cook went gallopin' off outta town—hot clew on the Jacques case, mebbe."

"Mebbe!" admitted Shorty, and he jerked away from McMeel. He crossed the dance floor in great bounds, weaving in and out among the dancing couples. He claimed Miss Moore as his partner a few seconds later. She seemed pleased over Shorty's attentions, but Coroner McMeel, watching the pair, shook his head in vague forebodings. Then he spoke aloud, to himself:

"Queer!" he muttered, staring. "Shorty up an' resignin' as deputy, an' Cook appointin' that feller Bert Sidlo in his place as deputy! An' then Shorty bestowin' most all his attentions on Bert's gal here t'-night—looks like kinda an exchange to me, but mebbe Bert don't know it; he got Shorty's job, an' Shorty got his gal—I figgered Shorty knowed about the appointment o' Bert an' was jus' getting even playin' around Miss Moore, but I guess it was news to him."

A minute later Coroner McMeel turned and picked himself out a fair, giggling partner. That Horace Stewart orchestra music was certainly irresistible!

But Shorty, although he danced, didn't hear the music. He didn't seem to hear the sweet words that Belle Moore was saying for his ears, and for his ears alone, either. No, Shorty danced, but he danced as if he were in a trance. He bumped into other couples, and he excused himself in incoherent mumbles. He kept time to the music, but unconsciously, it seemed. His eyes, peering over Belle's pretty, rounded shoulder, were fixed on space. His face wore a grim, strange look.

Bert Sidlo appointed a deputy sheriff to succeed him!

It was almost unbelievable, but Shorty knew that Coroner McMeel undoubtedly knew what he was talking about. McMeel had the faculty of knowing everything about everybody else's business in Monte Vista and all surrounding towns. Bert Sidlo the new deputy, eh? Huh! Funny, that! And he and the sheriff had galloped right out of town in a hurry, too! Strange! What kind of a clew had they unearthed? Shorty caught his breath.

"Mebbe it's a false alarm!" he grunted.

"What did yuh say, Shorty?" asked Belle.

"I said it was sure nice to waltz around," lied Shorty, gamely. "Gee, but yuh're one swell little dancer, Belle!"

And after that Shorty seemed to forget all his woes. His harassed look vanished. A smile crossed his face and stayed there. He finished the dance with Belle Moore, and then, most reluctantly, it seemed, he relinquished her to others while he had a dance apiece with half a dozen other Monte Vista girls. But even as he danced with them he kept watching Belle.

Old Coroner McMeel watched all this, and once, when Shorty and his partner whisked past McMeel and his

partner, the coroner had to sniff and make a complimentary remark.

"That Shorty," he said, in admiration, "sure has anointed hisself with some grand perfume! I smelt it when I was talkin' to him a while back—umm, sure is sweet-smellin' stuff, ain't it?"

"Sure is!" agreed McMeel's blond partner.

Then came the "good-night" dance, with Belle and Shorty as partners again. It was long after midnight when the dance broke up. And the canny McMeel noticed that Shorty took Belle home.

CHAPTER V.

SHORTY, BATTLING FOOL.

IT might have been by accident, and it might have been by design on some one's part, that Shorty McKay and Bert Sidlo met right in front of the sheriff's office the next morning. Bert had just stepped out on the street with Coroner Joe McMeel, who had dropped around to find out if the clew Bert and the sheriff had gone out on the night before had developed anything. It hadn't, it seemed. And McMeel, anxious to see what effect his news would have on the new deputy sheriff, had mentioned to Bert that Shorty, the man whose job he had taken, had been "playin' up" to Belle Moore.

"I'll push him in the face fer that!" Bert had said, and then he started out of the office. The old coroner, anxious to avoid any unpleasantness, had followed, advising Bert to keep cool and not to try any foolish tactics—and right at that critical moment Shorty had stepped from the Elite Café and headed straight for them! The coroner had groaned, unhappily, but Bert squared off.

"Hey, yuh, Shorty!" called Bert ungraciously.

"Hey yuh yuhrself!" snapped Shorty, advancing.

"What's this I hear about yuh shinin' around my gal las' night at yuhr cheap dance?" demanded Bert savagely, and he drew back one clenched fist as if to strike Shorty right there.

But Shorty didn't retreat. He smiled—curiously.

"I reckon the coroner thar has been speakin' pieces outta school," remarked Shorty, his eyes glittering, "but what ef I was shinin' around Miss Moore, as yuh charges? She ain't yuhr gal as far as I kin find out—not now, anyhow, because——"

Bert's chin went forward, aggressively.

"Why ain't she, huh?"

"Because I aims to make her my best gal," said Shorty, with a broader grin. "Yuh seem to have taken my job, Bert, an' I figger on kinda takin' yuhr gal—a little trade, we'll say!"

Bert's black eyes flashed a warning, and the next minute, with an oath, he swung at Shorty—but Shorty simply stepped to one side. He was peeling off his coat before Coroner McMeel, realizing that he had helped precipitate the hostilities, jumped between the two men in an effort to act as peacemaker.

"Gents—gents," he gasped, "this ain't no way to show off here on the main street—a deputy an' an ex-deputy!"

"I'll knock him inter the next county!" swore Bert.

"I'm waitin' fer yuh to do it, yuh windbag!" said Shorty, and he threw his coat to the ground, unbuckled his belt with its holstered six-gun, and dropped that, too. "Now, yuh Bert Sidlo, supposin' yuh take off yuhr coat an' toss yuhr gun an' badge down thar—an' then we'll settle this little matter!"

"Gentlemen, gentlemen!" cried McMeel, hopelessly.

But Bert had acted on Shorty's sug-

gestion instantly. He pulled out of his coat in a jiffy, threw his belt off, and unpinned his badge and dropped it. Then, fists clenched, he stepped forward, brushing the protesting coroner out of the way. He took a healthy lunge at Shorty, but Shorty, the smaller of the two, ducked nimbly to one side, crouched, bobbed under Bert's guard, and drove home a short left jab to Bert's ribs that made him grunt.

And then the battle was on in earnest. Whatever Bert Sidlo's reputation for general shiftlessness in Monte Vista might be, he was not a coward. He had plenty of nerve, but no restraint. He had learned his style of mauling around the Twin Pines Pool Emporium, where bulk rather than science had counted. He showered Shorty with a rain of swift blows now, but Shorty managed to turn most of them aside or catch them where they did no great damage. As for Shorty, he fought back, coolly and deliberately. He shot in a right to Bert's chin that staggered the larger man, and then he smacked a left hook into Bert's ribs that made Bert grunt again.

In a minute, it seemed, one of Bert's eyes had been blackened by one of Shorty's quick jabs, and then the fight grew really furious. Coroner McMeel, seeing a crowd collecting, again attempted to part the battlers; but Bert, either intentionally or accidentally, caught the coroner a slam on the side of the head that sent McMeel reeling into the crowd. At that moment Shorty saw his chance: he stepped in closer and let Bert have one straight from the shoulder. The blow caught Bert off poise, and he went back on his heels, swayed a second, and went down to one knee. Then he was up, swearing loudly, and rushing blindly back into conflict with the grinning Shorty.

The swearing, the fervent whooping of Coroner McMeel, who was nursing one cheek with a trembling hand and calling now on Shorty "to clean that bird right," and the exclamations of the little group of fight fans who had gathered, attracted the attention of Sheriff Joe Cook, and he flung open his office door just in time to see Shorty open up another barrage of fast blows that sent Bert Sidlo reeling. Bert was trying to imitate an ostrich now and was covering up his battered face with both hands, swearing savagely.

"Hey!" roared Sheriff Cook, jumping into the street.

Wham! Shorty, seeing the sheriff getting into action, had decided the time had come to wind up the fight. He twisted his head to one side, to avoid a glancing blow that Bert had aimed at him, and then poked a stunning right to Bert's head, followed it up with a left to his ribs, and, as Bert toppled, drove home a second short left jab to the big man's ribs. Bert sank down, and Shorty, still grinning, looked around, picked up his belt and drew the buckle tight, and then put on his coat. The crowd was cheering.

"What in heck are yuh tryin' to do, Shorty?" cried Sheriff Cook, stepping up. "Are yuh full o' tequila or what?"

"What!" said Shorty, and turned on his heel abruptly.

"Say—wait a minnit!" ordered the sheriff, and Bert, who was sitting on the ground, began to jabber excitedly, but Shorty paid no attention to the order. He increased his pace. He crossed the street in a hurry and disappeared into the front door of the Elite Café. The crowd in the street didn't know that he passed right through the café and out the rear exit, followed by Harry Tarvin, the chef, who was a personal friend. The pair went down the alley at a swift pace, Shorty still silent but smiling. And, as he went, he kept pulling papers and letters from his coat pockets, examin-

ing them and then stuffing them back in the pockets. He was panting.

"That was a great fight, Shorty!" gasped Tarvin, as Shorty finished taking inventory of his coat contents. "But, boy, ef I know anything about Bert Sidlo, he won't take no beatin' like that an' remain satisfied! He's liable to take a pot shot at yuh, or else to try to swear out charges agin' yuh, Shorty."

Shorty slowed up as they turned into a distant street.

"Let him try either!" said Shorty, grimly. "An', Harry, I hope I ain't takin' yuh from yuhr work too long?"

"When yuh tol' me come along I came," said Harry, simply. "Whar yuh—whar are we goin' now, Shorty, ef I may ask?"

"Up on Pecos Street!"

"Why, what's up thar?"

"I got a call to make," said Shorty, chuckling.

Meanwhile, the excitement had died down on Main Street. Bert, staggering to his feet, demonstrated right away that he was a mighty poor loser. He looked around at the gaping crowd —the crowd that had cheered Shorty—and made a fierce, profane announcement.

"I'm gonna swear out assault-an'-battery charges agin' that smart aleck, an' right now, too!" blurted Bert, with an oath, through swollen lips. "He was sore because I got his job as deputy an' he attacked me without warnin'—I was tooken by surprise. I had no chance to defend myself at fust, an' he poked me."

"Aw!" exclaimed Coroner McMeel, disgustedly. "It was yuh started that trouble, Bert—yuh took the first swing at Shorty."

The new deputy turned to swear at McMeel, but Sheriff Joe Cook, flushed with humiliation, took him by the arm. A fine advertisement for the sheriff's office! A deputy and an ex-deputy putting on a grand, knock-down-and-drag-out fight right on Main Street. And now Bert exhibiting his fluent profanity, which the sheriff didn't like at all. Of course, Bert was mad, and smarting from defeat, and perhaps he couldn't be fully blamed. The sheriff spoke soothingly to him.

"Bert, McMeel an' I will take yuh home in Mac's rig."

"Like heck!" said the peeved coroner, quickly.

"Oh, yes—we will!" said Sheriff Cook, and he fixed a hard eye on McMeel, and McMeel wilted. After all, it was his idle gossip that had started all the rumpus, anyway. So they put the worse-for-wear Bert into the coroner's buggy and, with the sheriff on one side and McMeel on the other side, Bert was propped up and driven off, while the crowd openly laughed and made remarks.

"Pore feller!"

"Beat up by that little Shorty!"

Sheriff Cook spoke curtly to the raging Bert.

"Yuh keep yuhr shirt on now, Bert," advised the sheriff; "it ain't proper fer no deputy sheriff to be tossin' bad language around promiscuous like yuh've been! We'll get yuh home an' get some bandages on yuh, an' let yuh rest, an' yuh'll feel better!"

"I'll file charges agin' him!" insisted Bert.

"Hey, Bert, here's yuhr coat!" whooped a bystander, as the buggy started off. "An' yuhr gun an' belt—an' yuhr nice new badge."

"Put 'em in my office!" ordered Sheriff Cook, over his shoulder.

The drive to Bert's house was made in silence. Bert lived alone in a little cottage on the outskirts of the business section, and Coroner McMeel speedily arrived there with his unwelcome passengers. They had to help the tired Bert out of the buggy and assist him to the house. The front door was

open, and as the sheriff and the coroner helped the sighing Bert in, two shadowy figures arose from chairs in the front room. The three men at the door blinked, for there was Shorty, getting up out of one chair, and Harry Tarvin, chef at the Elite, getting up out of another. It was Shorty who broke the tense silence.

"I come up here to return yuhr coat, Bert," said Shorty quietly. "Picked it up by mistake after our little—party; I brought Tarvin here along fer company—here's yuhr coat!"

"Yuh—yuh dirty crook!" cried Sidlo hotly. "Yuh—yuh—how yuh birds git in my house, eh? Yuh broke in!"

"We come through the door," said Shorty, tossing the coat into a chair, "an' we'll go out the same way, gents—ef yuh please!"

They brushed out. Neither Sheriff Cook nor Coroner McMeel uttered a word. They were too surprised to say anything appropriate.

"I'll file charges o' housebreakin' agin' yu, too!" yelled Bert, shaking a fist after Shorty, but Shorty made no answer to that.

CHAPTER VI.

A BUSY NIGHT!

SHORTY called on Belle Moore that evening, all dressed up in his Sunday best. On the way out to her house he had thoughtfully stopped at the Conifer Floral Shop and purchased a huge bouquet of roses. With the bouquet in one hand, and a bulky package under the other arm, Shorty proceeded on his way by back streets and alleys. He had no desire to meet any one he knew—carrying a lot of roses! It was the first time in his young life that he had ever carried roses to any one, and he was a bit self-conscious.

But Belle had received him graciously enough. She had accepted the roses with pretty words of thanks, and she had cast inquiring eyes at the other package Shorty had lugged along, but he did not offer that to her. Instead, he placed it on a chair very carefully, put his gray Stetson on top of it, equally carefully, and then proceeded to forget all about it.

Belle was a beautiful girl, there was no doubt of that. Shorty couldn't remember ever having seen a prettier girl, but now, alone with her in the parlor of the Moore house, Shorty was strangely ill at ease. He fidgeted and spoke of small things, and finally, abruptly, he arose and crossed the room and hastily pulled down the window shade. Belle laughed at his nervousness, and Shorty flushed and grinned, but a moment after Shorty had yanked down the shade a figure arose from a stooped position under the window and skulked back into the clump of near-by bushes.

Shorty, now that the shade was down snugly, breathed more easily. He forgot much of his bashfulness and found himself talking eloquently on any chance subject the conversation brought up. The minutes passed. The hours passed. And the figure lurking in the bush patch began to get more and more impatient. Several times the shadow had advanced to the window, but the shade was down too far to offer him a peek hole. He was on the verge of departing when a light sprang up in the Moore hall, and a moment later Shorty stepped jauntily out the door, his gray Stetson in one hand, his package in the other—and lingered for a moment.

"Belle, I—I—can't tell yuh how—how happy yuh've made me answerin' my kinda imprudent question t'-night," blurted Shorty, in a hushed voice, but one that carried to the figure in the bushes just the same. "I—I figgered—knowin' I knowed yuh fer such a short time that mebbe yuh wouldn't—wouldn't——"

"Shorty," sighed the girl, in a

grieved tone of voice, "yuh shouldn't say that—yuh know thar was but one answer that I could give—an'——"

The figure in the bushes relaxed a bit at that news.

But the next minute Shorty clapped his hat on his head, shoved his package under one arm, grabbed both of Belle's hands in his, and leaned forward and kissed her. Then, whirling around quickly, he leaped off the porch, disdaining the two steps, fled down the path to the sidewalk, and swung off toward the center of town at a rapidly increasing pace.

The man in the bushes grew tense. He had relaxed a little after he had heard Belle's words to Shorty on the porch, which had apparently indicated that Belle had not answered Shorty's "imprudent question" in the manner Shorty should have wished, but Shorty's sudden kiss and hasty departure threw doubt on the watcher's conclusions.

The shadower waited until the door closed, and the hall light went out, and then he scrambled out of concealment and breezed hastily after Shorty, who was swinging along with great steps. The man kept to the shadows as he trailed Shorty.

"Whoopee!" exclaimed Shorty, jumping a mud puddle. "Yeowie—oh, boy! Hot dawg!"

Such exclamations did not indicate that Shorty had received any discouraging answer at the Moore home, the trailer decided swiftly. He closed in on Shorty a bit, and his hand went to his holster, but he did not draw his gun.

Shorty, meanwhile, seemed blissfully unconscious of the threatened danger behind him. He whistled, whooped again, chuckled, pulled his hat over on one side of his head, did a few jig steps, and gave every sign of being very happy, bubbling with joy—immensely satisfied with himself. Such demonstrations did not please the shadow behind him.

Shorty went straight to the Elephant corral, and entered the dimly lighted portal of the feed barn. The man behind him hesitated, waited until Shorty was well inside the building, then made a wide detour, crossed to the corral, and crept up to a side window in the barn. There was no curtain on that window. No shade that might be drawn down. The man peeked through, into the yellow-lighted barn, and grunted in surprise. Shorty had seated himself on a bale of straw and was in the act of changing his shoes. He had opened the precious package he had carried to and from the girl's home, and it had apparently contained shoes. At least the package was open, the watcher saw, and Shorty was just putting on a shoe. A pair that, it seemed, he had just taken off rested at the end of the bale of straw.

Shorty's face was still wreathed in smiles. He got up suddenly and yanked a saddle and saddle blanket from a harness rack and lugged them over to a stall. A moment later he was busily girthing up a pinto. The man at the window edged back slightly as Shorty led the pinto onto the barn floor. Another second, and Shorty mounted, whistling cheerfully. He shook out the reins, and the pinto, pricking its dainty ears forward, stepped out into the night. There was a thud of hoofs across the barn yard; then the crunching of gravel as the horse struck the main road, and a moment later a quick tattoo as the pony galloped across the wooden bridge at the end of that block.

It was not until then that the man at the window crept out of the darkness and peered into the barn again. He would have liked to enter, but he knew there was an attendant there. The man might be asleep, because Shorty hadn't aroused him, but still——"

Meanwhile, Shorty spoke encouragingly to the pinto pony.

"Come along, boy—come along!" sang out Shorty, shifting his holster around where he could get at it in a hurry. "It'll be dawn in no time now, hoss, an' I ain't goin' to be surprised much ef we meet somebody afore we finish our little jaunt."

The pinto seemed to catch some of its rider's eagerness. It lengthened out into a run, and Shorty made no effort to hold it in. It was long past midnight, and the eastern skies were already becoming tinted. There was no time to lose. The pony seemed to know it. Shorty whistled and sang and mumbled, but every once in a while he'd break out in words that could be understood.

"That sweet little Belle—she's a dog-gone swell girl," he informed the pony several times in the first few miles. "She sure is a peach, that's all! A cute little peach! I sure had my nerve with me t'-night, I reckon, but that Belle—waal, they don't make many like her—no, sir, hoss, they don't!"

The pony knew the road to Bear Lake well enough. Shorty let him have his head all the way. It was still night when the pair reached the lake, and Shorty shifted his holster again, so that it would be convenient. He stared at the dark shadows near the edge of the clearing where he knew the charred remains of poor old Jacques Bolquet's cabin could be found. He shuddered slightly, but did not stop. He rode on around the shore of the big lake to the far end, where it emptied into Mud Creek. Then he rode down the creek. Dawn found him stepping gingerly along the creek bank near an abandoned mining tunnel and dump. The panting pinto, standing higher up, on a dim trail through the undergrowth, watched Shorty and wondered at Shorty's frequent whoops of delight.

CHAPTER VII.

SHERIFF COOK ACTS.

SHORTY was within a mile of Monte Vista, on his way back that morning, when he saw a bunch of mounted men tearing along the road toward him. His quick eye noticed the cavalcade a second before the alert pinto threw up its tired head, pointed its ears forward and snorted in alarm. Shorty spoke to it soothingly:

"Thar now, hoss—take it easy!"

But the pinto slowed down, and Shorty was satisfied, it seemed, with the slower gait. He put his hand on his holster and squinted at the approaching riders in some suspicion.

"Cook," he grunted, a second later, "an' Bert Sidlo, an' 'Red' Feeney—yes, an' McMeel, too—an' Eddie Owens, an' Luke Parslow—wonder what they figger on doin'."

The riders pulled up in a swirl of dust. Sheriff Cook, in the lead, had a gun on Shorty before Shorty's smile of welcome could fade off his face. The other men appeared tense and nervous.

"Take yuhr hand offn yuhr gun, Shorty!" rasped the old sheriff, in a peculiar tone of voice. "Quick now, Shorty!"

Shorty obediently lifted both hands above his head.

"That suit yuh?" he asked, casually.

"Yep—Bert, yuh ride up an' yank his gat off!"

"Yes, sir!"

Shorty's narrowed eyes glared at Bert Sidlo, the new deputy, as Bert carried out Sheriff Cook's terse order. It was plain that Bert enjoyed the situation much more than Shorty did. No one said a word as Bert got Shorty's gun and backed his sorrel pony away. Then Shorty laughed—uneasily.

"Waal," he snorted, "I suppose I'm arrested?"

"Sorry," said Sheriff Cook, in a

strained, awed voice, it seemed to Shorty, "but it sure appears so."

Shorty let his hands drop to the saddle horn.

"Fer assault an' battery, an' housebreakin' charges brung by yuhr brand-new deputy, Bert, I suppose?" he suggested, smiling; "he promised to have me arrested."

Sheriff Cook shook his head briskly.

"No, Shorty, nuthin' like that," he said, sadly, "mebbe it's all a mistake—but—whar have you been?"

Shorty shrugged. He was inclined to play for time until he could fathom what this proceeding meant, but he saw Sheriff Cook's eyes dart suddenly to his shoes. He saw Coroner McMeel and Eddie Owens staring hard at his feet. He glanced down at his mud-caked shoes, with the yellowish clay hard on them.

Then he threw up his head defiantly.

"I been to the ol' mine on Mud Creek," he said.

"What doin', Shorty?"

"Fishin'," said Shorty, sarcastically. "What do yuh suppose I'd be doin' thar, eh?"

"Yuh went las' night?"

"Yes—or early this mawnin', rather."

"Went around by Bear Lake, Shorty?"

"Sure—the quickest way."

"Waal," said Sheriff Cook, and he glanced around at the silent group of riders, "I'm plumb sorry, Shorty—it doesn't seem right—but I gotta tell yuh that yuh are under arrest. These boys here—Bert, an' Joe McMeel, an' Eddie Owens, an' Red Feeney, an' Luke Parslow—are all friends o' yuhrs, Shorty. I asked them to come with me when I came out fer yuh; they'll see—they'll help me see that yuh git a square deal, Shorty—a blamed square deal."

Shorty's blue eyes glittered coldly.

"Swell friends to have in a pinch," he said, curtly. "I suppose yuh're tryin' to blame that Bolquet murder on me?"

No one spoke. Bert Sidlo smiled, however, and that was answer enough for Shorty. Yes, that was it, sure enough! They were holding him for the murder of Jacques Bolquet. He sighed despite himself. Sheriff Cook kept his eyes averted now and motioned that the cavalcade should swing around and head for town. Bert Sidlo and Luke Parslow fell in behind Shorty, and the move was on. No one said a word. Shorty was white-faced, and his tightly drawn lips were bloodless. He wondered what turn of events had brought about such a sudden surprise, but he knew better than to appear curious on the subject. He knew from his own experience as a deputy that the best thing he could do was to keep silent until some one played a trump card.

The ride back to Monte Vista that morning might have been a funeral, as far as the men in the little group were concerned. With eyes set straight ahead, and lips drooping, the sheriff led the way. Coroner McMeel and Eddie Owens rode next, side by side, both pictures of despair. Then came Red Feeney, jogging along beside Shorty, speechless. Bert Sidlo and Luke Parslow brought up the rear. Bert appeared to be the happiest of the lot. After all, why shouldn't he be? The man who had tried to steal his girl, who had whipped him in a fist fight, and who had humiliated him before a street crowd, was in custody for murder! What could be better?

Once in town, the cavalcade cantered direct to the sheriff's office and dismounted. Bert gathered up the dangling reins and led the horses across to the feed stables, where they would be out of sight and arouse no suspicions from passers-by. Shorty stepped jauntily into the office he knew so well

and the sheriff motioned him to a seat. Shorty deliberately picked out the easiest chair in the room and dragged it around the table to a place near the big window. The window was open, and the morning breeze was cool, but Shorty wiped his brow with a handkerchief and loosened his shirt collar.

None of this was lost on the silent watchers.

"Shorty," said Sheriff Cook, after all the men had found seats, "I might explain to yuh fust why these gents came with me to see yuh this mawnin'. They're all friends o' yuhrs, as yuh know—I picked 'em carefully, fer this is a serious matter. As yuh set thar now, Shorty—much as it hurts me to tell yuh—yuh are accused o' the murder of ol' Jacques Bolquet. Now keep quiet until I finishes, Shorty! It may not be true. I pray to Heaven that it isn't true! I thought I knowed yuh well enough to be sure yuh was on the square—waal, no matter; I brought these boys with me to protect yuh—ef the word got out that we was holdin' yuh on suspicion o' that killin', I'm afraid that hell would pop. The town is aroused over it, as yuh knows. I want to demonstrate until yuh has yuhr chance to explain things—to show us—me—that yuh're innocent."

Bert Sidlo entered and closed the door.

"I guess everything is all right," he said, in a hushed voice. "I got the hosses under cover—no one is wise."

"Good!" said the sheriff. "We don't want no racket. Now, Shorty, I don't need to tell yuh that the truth is the best policy in a case like this, ef yuh are involved——"

Shorty stood up suddenly.

"Who makes the accusation?" he asked, softly.

Sheriff Cook looked at him a full minute, it seemed, before he answered. Then he shook his head.

"I kain't tell yuh, Shorty, because I don't know. I found a note under this office door when I came this mawnin'—it wasn't signed, but it made some serious charges—part of which has already been proved. What was yuh doin' at Mud Creek, Shorty?"

"Fishin'," said Shorty, swiftly.

"Yuh wasn't inclined to admit at fust that yuh was at Mud Creek at all when we met yuh on the road," went on the old sheriff, sadly, "until yuh saw us——"

"Lookin' at my shoes," said Shorty, grimly. "Yes, they has got mud on 'em, as yuh kin see. Dried, yellow mud. Mud that would come from jus' one place in this territory—from Mud Creek below the ol' mine tunnel an' dump—yellow clay mud from the ol' dump——"

"Yes," said Sheriff Cook.

"The mud is dried on them shoes, boss," said Shorty, raising his head and looking around at the little silent group of men, all watching him. "Yuh wouldn't be able to tell, now, whether I got that mud on them this mawnin' or—or—some other mawnin'—around—around the time ol' Jacques was murdered."

The group straightened in their chairs instantly. Sheriff Cook's eyes widened. Deputy Bert Sidlo laughed harshly.

"Thar, the cat's outta the bag!" he cried.

"Yuh're comin' mighty close to damagin' admissions, Shorty," said the old sheriff, a bit reproachfully, it seemed. "I might warn yuh that anything yuh say——"

There was a knock on the office door.

"Bert, see who that is!" said Cook.

The deputy opened the door cautiously, but three men brushed into the room with a rush. The old sheriff got to his feet, his hand going toward his holster. He glared at the newcomers—Jim Holmes, Bob Reed, and "Slim" Carter.

"Waal—what yuh boys want?"

"Nuthin', sheriff," said Reed, "exceptin' to see the fun—we got wind yuh have the bird who kilt ol' Jacques."

"Sssshhh!" cried the sheriff, warningly. "Who tol' yuh men that, eh? Who tol' yuh we has anybody——"

"We ain't blind," said Carter, quietly.

There was another rap, and before any one could answer it, the door swung wide, and in walked Frank Jefferies and Tony Marrs. Shorty held up a hand for attention.

"Sheriff," he said, huskily, "the show seems to be on. All I gotta say is this: let me see that accusin' letter—or read it to me—an' I'll have a statement to make pronto!"

The sheriff hesitated.

"Read it to him—an' to us!" suggested one of the newcomers, ominously. "This ain't no time fer secrets."

Sheriff Cook pulled an envelope from his pocket impulsively. Shorty's eyes fastened on it as the sheriff withdrew a folded slip of paper. The color had gone suddenly from Shorty's face. He leaned forward, putting both hands on the table to support himself. He stared hard at the envelope and the piece of paper that was trembling now in the old sheriff's hands. There was another rap on the door.

Bert opened it slightly, and some one outside asked to be admitted. Bert protested, but the door opened wider.

"Let 'em in," said Shorty, defiantly; "let 'em all in—I want every one to hear all this, anyhow!"

So Bert stepped aside, gladly—and in came four more men. They saluted the sheriff gruffly and exchanged significant glances with the other newcomers. Shorty motioned to the sheriff.

"Read that letter—now!" he ordered.

Sheriff Cook read in a flat, toneless voice.

"Dear sheriff. This is a tip as to who kilt that pore ol' hermit, Jacques Bolquet, out to Bear Lake. It is time thar was justice done. I kin tell yuh confidentially who kilt him. It was yuhr former deputy, Shorty, as did that job——"

Sheriff Cook's voice faltered.

"Go on!" said Shorty, while the men in the room held their breath. Another late comer was admitted by Bert Sidlo, and the sheriff continued his reading.

"I know for sure that it was Shorty because ol' Jacques hisself tol' me only a few weeks ago that he had tol' Shorty he had hid some money in the ol' mine tunnel on Mud Creek. Later he saw Shorty around thar an' feared him. Yuh will find a pair o' shoes in Shorty's home covered with yaller mud. It was because Shorty got all the money out of the tunnel that he kin afford to think o' weddin' bells now, although he is out a job. He is out to the tunnel t'night lookin' for more buried treasure. He is guilty. He should be strung up. Sincerely,

"A FRIEND."

There was silence for a minute. Then two or three of the newcomers growled—and at that moment Shorty jumped sideways and literally flung himself through the open window. He landed running. A gun popped in the office, and there was a surge toward the window, but Shorty had disappeared around the end of the building. He was gone!

CHAPTER VIII.

NIGHT—AND AN ARREST.

IT was evening again. Lights suddenly flickered up in the sheriff's office, and shadows passed back and forth behind the drawn shades. There was turmoil and confusion in the corrals of the feed barns. A tired, dusty posse had returned—empty-handed. There was much cursing, many loud arguments, as the worn horses were put up.

"Tod" Bohn, the night man at the barn, asked for news.

"Ain't none—he just flew away," said Frank Jefferies, one of the possemen, disgustedly. "He musta had help!"

"Which way yuh reckon he went?" asked Bohn, wide-eyed.

"Waal, he was supposed to head fer the ol' minin' tunnel on Mud Creek," said Bob Reed; "at least, so 'Pud' Johnson told us afore we started. Shorty took Pud's hoss away from him an' beat it, tellin' Pud he was goin' to the tunnel whar he had a rifle an' ammunition an' meant to sell his life dearly."

"An' wasn't he thar?" asked Bohn.

"Not when we got thar," went on Reed, angrily. "We got to the tunnel, an' the sheriff called on Shorty to surrender, but thar wasn't no answer. Nobody wanted to go in, so we built a fire to smoke him out. But he didn't show up. Finally, Bert Sidlo an' two o' the boys went in, aimin' to shoot Shorty on sight ef they saw him; but he wasn't in the tunnel, an' thar wasn't no rifle thar nor ammunition, either—he was plumb gone."

Tod Bohn swore a real hostler's oath—vivid, fiery.

"So that dirty —— got away, eh?"

"So fur," said Slim Carter, another posseman, slowly, "but not fer long. The sheriff an' Bert is goin' to telegraph Alamosa an' Wagon Wheel Gap an' Pueblo an' Salida an' half a dozen other p'ints t'-night, an' to-morrow another posse is goin' over to Squaw Mountain on a hunch."

"Hope yuh all git him!" said Tod, gruffly.

"We will—sure enough!" said Carter.

A few minutes later the last of the possemen had left the stable. All was silent except for the munching horses. A figure came slowly down the ladder from the loft, followed by a second figure. The first figure saluted Tod with a flourish.

"Good work, Tod, ol' man!"

"Shorty, yuh sure has got nerve!" exclaimed the grinning stableman. "An' them boobs ain't got no sense at all, has they? I sure found out what luck they had, didn't I?"

"Yuh did fine," said Shorty, briskly, and then he turned to the figure that had come down the loft ladder behind him. "Pud, yuh head fer the Elite Café right quick now—git Harry Tarvin, the chef thar, an' then tell Harry to do his stuff as we agreed on. Git back here to the sheriff's office soon as yuh kin, Pud, an' burst right in—I may need yuh bad by that time."

"All right, Shorty!"

Pud Johnson streaked out of the barn.

"Here, Tod, yuh take this six-gun," said Shorty, handing a weapon to the expectant stableman, "an' ef yuh have nerve, as I knows blame well yuh has, prepare to use it now. Yuh jus' foller me an' hold that gat out prominent whar no one will mistake it fer a pencil or a currycomb an'—ef we do git in a jam—waal, yuh wait fer me to start shootin' afore yuh does—see?"

Tod Bohn grinned hopefully.

"Whar are we goin', Shorty?"

"Over across the street—to the sheriff's office."

"What?"

"Come on!"

Shorty led the way. Tod Bohn followed right on Shorty's heels. At the sheriff's office door Shorty paused for just a moment to listen. He could hear the arguing voices of Sheriff Cook and Deputy Sheriff Bert Sidlo inside. There might be others there, too, but if there were, they were momentarily silent. Shorty turned and whispered to Tod.

"Yuh cover the sheriff, Tod—he won't try nuthin'."

"Ye-e-es, sir—Mister Shorty."

With that, Shorty flung open the door which, fortunately, had not been locked. The next second Shorty was blinking in the brightly lighted office, sighting down the blue barrel of a six-gun at the startled face of Bert Sidlo, deputy sheriff.

"Hands up—both yuh hombres!" snapped Shorty.

Out of the corner of one eye Shorty saw that Tod Bohn, following orders, had swung a gun in the direction of Sheriff Cook. The old sheriff reached for the ceiling promptly, but not any more swiftly than Bert Sidlo did.

"Tod," cried Shorty, "go fetch Bert's gun—quick—an' on the way back pick up the sheriff's gat—hurry!"

The stableman obeyed. He was nimble and efficient.

"Now," said Shorty, "yuh birds kin drap yuhr hands, but remember this—no funny work, or I'll shoot."

The raised hands came down, limply.

"Shorty, what in glory——" began the old sheriff.

"Now that we're all friends here," said Shorty, grimly, "I'll jus' ask Mr. Tod Bohn to step over an' lock that door. An' ef any one raps, see who it is before yuh let 'em in, Toddy. As fer yuh, Bert, yuh better set down in a chair—not too near that winder, either; it's too handy—an' when we're all settled we're goin' to kinda discuss the recent murder o' pore ol' Jacques Bolquet, fer which, it seems, I've been blamed."

"Yuh'll git yuhrs yit!" snarled Bert, from his chair.

"Shorty, yuh're runnin' terrible risks!" cried the old sheriff, brokenly. "Ef yuh was lucky enough to escape this mawnin', yuh shouldn't put yuhr head into the noose by darin' this sort o' recklessness—I thought yuh had better sense."

Shorty laughed.

"Ef I was guilty o' that murder, I probably wouldn't be here now," said Shorty, never taking his eyes from Bert Sidlo's white face, "but I ain't guilty, sheriff, an' deep down in yuhr heart yuh knows it. An' Bert here, he knows it, too! Despite that accusin' letter, despite the mud on my shoes, despite my escape outta this very office this mawnin', despite the fact yuh caught me comin' back from Bear Lake this mawnin'——"

"Yuh're a liar!" growled Sidlo.

The deputy's charge seemed to remind Shorty of something.

"By the way, sheriff," said Shorty, suddenly, "why did yuh appoint this loud-mouthed, empty-haided, never-no-account Bert Sidlo to a job as deputy? Keep quiet, Bert! I'm askin' yuh fer the truth, sheriff—the plain truth?"

Sheriff Cook had a hunch that he better answer truthfully. Maybe it was because Shorty's gun was swinging around. Perhaps it was because he still believed—slightly, at least—in Shorty.

"The truth was—is—that Bert said he could aid me a heap in ketchin' ol' Jacques' murderer," blurted out the sheriff. "I had to have a deputy quick, anyhow, an' Bert claimed he had some inside dope—an'—waal, I took a chance."

"An' lost," said Shorty, grimly, "fer he has tried to fasten blame fer that murder on an innocent man—on me!"

"What?"

"Yuh liar!"

There was a rap on the door. Tod Bohn opened it a crack, then swung it wider. In stepped Pud Johnson. At sight of Pud, Bert Sidlo glared and brought up an accusing finger.

"Yuh—yuh're in with this louse, Shorty, too!"

"Yep," said Pud, easily, "reckon I am. I'm a friend o' Shorty's fust, las' an' all the time. When he asked me to tell yuh he'd gone to the Mud Creek tunnel this mawnin' I did——"

"Yuh'll be sorry," began the fuming Sidlo, but Shorty cut him short.

"Bert, yuh shut yuhr mouth! Pud, is—is the others out thar, outside?"

"Sure!"

"Get 'em in here!"

Again the door opened as Pud stuck his head out and whispered. Then it swung wider, and in stepped Harry Tarvin, the chef at the café, and the chalky-faced Miss Belle Moore. Shorty smiled at her, but she did not smile back. She took one frightened look at Sidlo and then averted her eyes.

"Belle!" cried Bert, starting up. "What does this——"

"Set down, Bert!" ordered Shorty, bringing his gun around, and then both Bert and the sheriff noticed that Pud and Harry, as well as Tod Bohn, had six-guns in their hands. "Oh, we're ready," explained Shorty, catching the looks of the sheriff and the deputy, "in case any o' yuhr hot-headed friends come back, Bert—any o' yuhr handpicked posse! Yuh snake! When I was in here this mawnin' accused o' murder an' bein' assured o' justice an' fair play, yuh had already started "Squint" Ames around town to spread the alarm an' organize a lynchin' party afore I could explain."

"A lie!" yelled Bert, wildly.

"I heard yuh tellin' Ames when yuh brung the hosses in after yuh ketched Shorty this mawnin'," said Tod Bohn. "It ain't no lie!"

"Gettin' down to brass tacks," said Shorty, quickly, "I'm here to clear myself o' a charge o' murder, sheriff! That letter yuh got—get it out, hold it up in the light—the envelope, I mean—that's it! Now, Harry Tarvin, yuh ain't never seen that letter before, has yuh? He ain't had a chance to, has he, sheriff?"

"No—not that I knows of!" admitted the stunned sheriff.

"Waal, this is sure nice!" chuckled Shorty. "Harry, look close at that funny envelope an' say whar yuh ever seen one like it before—that is, ef yuh kin say so truthfully?"

Tarvin spoke fast. He seemed to bite off his words.

"I saw that envelope, or some like it—funny,' square-shaped like it is—in a desk at Bert Sidlo's cottage."

"What!" shouted Bert, suddenly. "Yuh lyin'——"

"We'll go up thar later an' see ef we kain't find some jus' like it," said Shorty, smoothly. "Harry an' I both saw 'em, fortunately, when we went through yuhr place, Bert. Oh, don't get so mad—we went through yuhr place—an' yuh know it only too well!"

The deputy sheriff sputtered.

"Picked that fight with Bert on the street the other day jus' to help out my plan," blurted Shorty, "said plan bein' to see what Bert had in his coat pockets. I purposely picked up the wrong coat after the row. Thar was nuthin' worth while in the pockets. But it gave me a chance to return it—to get into Bert's rooms. I took Tarvin along as a witness. Accidentally, we found these funny square envelopes in his desk—thought little of 'em until yuh got that unsigned note accusin' me, sheriff, in one of them. So it was Bert wrote that accusin' letter!"

"Lie—lie!" mumbled Sidlo.

"An' why did Bert write that accusin' letter?" went on Shorty, laughing. "Because things were gettin' too hot. He was anxious to fasten the blame on me an' get a posse o' his friends to string me up afore I could talk. Dead men tell no tales, yuh know. He was sore because he thought I had stolen his girl—Belle here; he feared I might find out who actually did kill Jacques, and he knew that I had found some evidence in his rooms, although he overlooked the fact that I might have seen the telltale envelopes—that Harry might have seen 'em, too."

"All a danged lie!" shouted Bert. "It's all——"

"Not so loud, Bert!" cautioned Shorty. "Why did yuh do all this? Yuh got this job in the fust place to cover up! What did we find in yuhr rooms—Harry Tarvin an' me? A pair o' shoes, all covered with mud, yaller mud—mud that grows in only one place in this country—on Mud Creek below the ol' mine tunnel! I carried those shoes with me out to Miss Moore's house, then to the feed barn. I was afraid then that yuh'd get wise, missin' the shoes, an' try to hold me up an' git 'em, so I put them on—they fitted me fairly well. I rode out to Mud Creek—found tracks—ol' dried tracks in the mud, stepped in 'em—the shoes fitted into the impressions snugly, no chance fer mistake. I follers back along a trail—kinda dim in places—toward Bear Lake. I finds two soiled, bloody gloves in the bushes, whar no one would ever think o' lookin'—they tell me at the Centennial store that they sold yuh those gloves a year ago, Bert."

"Yuh're—yuh're framin' me!"

"Shorty," cried Sheriff Cook, leaping up despite the threat of the bristling guns, "yuh're accusin' Bert here o' murder!"

"Lissen," said Shorty, "the man who kilt Jacques took the Mud Creek route back to town, so's to search the mine tunnel on the way. He thought Jacques' money might be thar, seein' he hadn't found it in the house he tore up after the murder. Bert's shoes fit the tracks whar the man waded Mud Creek below the mine. His gloves are on the trail—bloody——"

Bert Sidlo's face was very pale.

"Circumstantial evidence!" he cried, hoarsely. "All pure circumstantial evidence—tryin' to frame me, yuh dirty crook!"

Shorty laughed.

"Yuh was blamed smart, brother—or thought yuh was," went on Shorty; "yuh thought yuh never left no clews in pore ol' Jacques' cabin! Waal, yuh didn't, but yuh foolishly took somethin' away an' then later yuh went back an' burned the place down to try to cover it up—too late! I had taken the thing yuh left—or rather, the clew to what yuh took with yuh outta thar—look a' here, sheriff, an' see ef yuh recognize this little thing?"

Shorty pulled a tiny, red-leather volume from a pocket.

"Take a look at that, boss!" he said.

"Why, yes," said the sheriff, in a low voice, a voice that trembled, "I do remember that. I saw yuh take it outta a box in ol' Jacques' cabin the day we found his body—it's a little red book, a French book, I guess. Yes, it's the same one—I remember yuh readin' off the title off the back—'E-t-e Rose'—yes, I saw yuh take that book outta a box in the cabin."

Bert Sidlo choked suddenly.

"Waal, it ain't a French book, sheriff," said Shorty, swinging his gun around on the nervous Bert again; "open it—pull the end out—that's it—see, it's empty! I thought that was funny. I kept it. I took up the other volumes in that little box I found on the cabin floor. They were not empty. They had little bottles in 'em—I remembered the titles on them—*Violette* an' *Automne Fougere* an' *Printemps Muguet*—an' I looked up the French later and found out that them names were names o' French perfumes. I wired New York fer a big bottle o' that 'Ete Rose,' which was missin' outta the box——"

"Lissen here," interrupted Bert Sidlo.

"I got it an' doused myself with it, an' yuh fired me," went on Shorty, talking directly to Sheriff Cook now, "but I had a motive. I figgered the murderer had taken that bottle o' rare perfume from Jacques Bolquet's. Ef he had, what would he most likely do with it? Ef he was a local man, he'd

give it to a local girl, probably. I knew it was a local man because a tramp wouldn't know the rumors about Jacques keepin' a fortune in his cabin. Waal, I doused myself with that 'Ete Rose' an' started to play the girls—I had no idea what girl might recognize that odor. I had to flit around quite a bit. I asked each one ef she had ever smelt anything like it—it was a peculiar perfume—an' no one admitted it. Then I threw the big dance at Spruce Hall—an' that night Miss Belle Moore here admitted she had smelt that kinda perfume before. Thar was my clew—she was Bert's gal—I had found something to kinda follow up!"

"Lie—a danged lie!" shouted Bert.

"I couldn't get much out o' Belle that night, so I framed to get Bert's coat an' search it. McMeel helped me by tellin' Bert about me dancin' with Belle. Bert was ready to fight. I got his coat then. Frisked it before Tarvin, a witness. Went to Bert's house on the excuse o' returnin' the coat. Found the muddy shoes. Recognized the yaller mud—accidentally noticed the funny envelopes. Sneaked out the shoes. Now I was pretty sure——"

Shorty fixed a steady look on the squirming Bert.

"Then I went back to see Miss Moore that evenin'—had to pretend, I'm sorry to say, that I was terribly in love an' terribly jealous. Asked her about that perfume, an' finally—sweet little gal that she is—she answered all my questions. Yes, she had smelt 'Ete Rose' before, although she didn't know its name. She got the little bottle that had come out of the box, an' the fake book coverin' in ol' Jacques' shack. I smelled it. It was 'Ete Rose' sure enough. Miss Moore?"

"Yes, Shorty."

"Please tell the men here—the sheriff—whar yuh got that bottle o' perfume."

"Belle!" shouted Bert Sidlo, madly.

"Mr. Sidlo gave it to me," said the girl, shivering; "said a man had sent it to him from the East, the same night he tol' me that we—we couldn't be married right away, as we had planned, because he had lost out on a deal in which he had expected to get a lot o' money. He had talked fer weeks before that about gettin' a large sum o' money an' elopin' quick——"

The girl broke into tears.

"I have Mr. Shorty here to thank fer savin' me from—from aidin' a murderer," she gasped. "He tol' me what he was drivin' at after I had confessed about the perfume. He said he was sure about Bert then, an' that he was takin' the muddy shoes to Mud Creek right away to try to fit the impressions; an' after he had left, Mr. Sidlo came in a awful mood an' asked me fer that bottle o' perfume. After Mr. Sidlo threatened to kill me I tol' him Shorty had taken it. He asked whar Shorty had gone. I had to tell him to Mud Creek. Then he swore to kill me ef I ever said——"

Shorty smiled down at the old sheriff.

"Then he wrote the letter, accusin' me," said Shorty; "it was his last hope. He arranged fer swift justice fer me. A lynchin' bee in a hurry afore I had a chance to prove my innocence! When I saw Carter an' Jefferies an' them other pals o' Bert's flockin' in here after yuh brought me in this mawnin' I knew that Bert had planned a necktie party—so that is why I jumped out the window, on a desperate chance, framed Johnson here to give yuh all false directions, and hid out in the hay at the feed barn, waitin' my chance to prove that I didn't kill Jacques. Bert, I'll personally arrange a posse o' my friends to take care o' yuh t'-night unless——"

"We'll take him, Shorty!" cried Tod Bohn.

"Sure will!" cried Harry Tarvin.

"I'm in!" whooped Pud Johnson, hopefully.

"Unless yuh sign a statement now admittin' yuhr guilt," went on Shorty, "an' in that event I'll guarantee to git yuh safely to jail in Alamosa until the excitement cools off."

Bert Sidlo was shaking like a leaf. His eyes were on Bohn and Johnson and Tarvin, men he knew would not hesitate to make good any threat Shorty made. Suddenly, he glared at Belle.

"I might know, trustin' a woman!" he cried, suddenly. "Waal, I never loved yuh anyhow, Belle—so thar! Give me ink—a pen—paper—I'll sign a statement! I'll confess! I never meant to kill ol' Jacques—just meant to stun him—made a mistake—hit too hard. An' the ol' man had his dough in the bank all the time—kin yuh feature that? Waal, here goes nuthin'—git yuhr statement ready—I'll sign—dang it—I'll sign!"

The sheriff fumbled clumsily for paper and ink, but Shorty stepped across the room and jerked the deputy badge off Bert.

"Yuh won't need that star any more," said Shorty, "an' besides, no deputy sheriff in this office ever signs a confession o' murder. What'll I do with this thing, Sheriff Cook?"

The old sheriff looked up wearily, his gray eyes twinkled despite his evident fatigue and excitement.

"Why, pin it on, o' course, Shorty—it's yuhrs, anyhow!" said the sheriff. "An' ef yuh don't mind me suggestin' it, Shorty, mebbe yuh kinda better look after Miss Moore thar until I git this statement ready."

Shorty turned to Belle Moore and took her trembling hands in his. Her black eyes were moist with tears. But she managed to smile a little, anyway. And Johnson and Tod Bohn and Harry Tarvin snatched their eyes away from the miserable Bert long enough to watch Shorty kiss Belle—but he disappointed them and didn't.

"It's all come out all right!" she faltered.

"It sure has!" said Shorty. "It had to come out that way—it was all in the books, yuh know—in the little French books—which weren't books but perfume!"

And then they both laughed. The others laughed, too—all except Sheriff Cook, who was busy preparing a statement that would hold in court later, and Bert Sidlo, late deputy. Bert's white lips did move—but they framed a suppressed oath—and not a laugh. After all, he realized, it had all been in the books!

Red Raiders

(Krent-Poos, Warrior, Pacifist)

By A. B. Searles

Author of "Little Crow, the Scourge of Minnesota," etc.

SOME day, perhaps, will come out of the West the poet who can sing the epic of the vanishing American in all its grim contrast of sinister beauty and bloodcurdling horror. And surely, when that poem is penned, through it will move some such tragic figure as that of Krent-poos, last great chief of the Oregon Modocs. His story is one of heartbreak and disillusionment. Yet for all the pathos of his life, we need not offer pity on the altar of his memory, for his noble heart could dignify defeat and his courage win the admiration even of his bitterest enemies.

In 1867, the two tribes, the Klamaths and the Modocs, ceded to the government the land which they held in the lake district in Oregon. At this time the nominal chief of the Modocs was old Schonchin, a weakling and a coward. Because of these ignoble characteristics, the tribe paid allegiance not to him but to Krent-poos, a younger and more courageous scion of the blood royal.

When in 1870 the Modocs were moved to a new reservation which had been established in the district, trouble began to fester. There had been bad blood between the Modocs and the Klamaths for generations past. Now an unthinking government had penned these opposing factions within a comparatively small space. On the whole, the Modocs were a peaceable people; the Klamaths were the aggressors in the disaster which inevitably resulted from the unfortunate propinquity. Insult and persecution fell on the law-abiding followers of Krent-poos. Their fishing grounds were disturbed; their fields of growing corn trampled; crowning injury, no Modoc woman was safe outside the encampment.

Schonchin endured these indignities in silence, but Krent-poos, taking the initiative into his own hands, made bitter complaint to the government agent.

This agent was evidently one of those men who have the wisdom to attempt to placate rather than antagonize their charges. Accordingly, in response to Krent-poos' repeated request for aid, he moved the entire tribe to another locality.

Contentedly enough the Modocs set to work in their new surroundings, but Fate was not satisfied to leave Krent-poos and his people in peace. By some inexplicable blunder, a band of Klamaths was transferred from the original reservation and set down in the very dooryard of the Modoc settlement. Again there were insults and aggressions; again complaints were made to the sympathetic agent. He urged his charges to return to their first encampment and offered to aid them in chastising the Klamaths should they again prove annoying. After some hesitation, Krent-poos, acting upon this advice, led his followers back to their old homes on Lost River and Tulé Lake.

Shortly after, one of the Modoc braves fell ill. For some unfathomable reason a Klamath medicine man attended the stricken warrior. He died, and Krent-poos, deeming the Klamath responsible, as a matter of course, killed the medicine man. At once the Klamath tribe was up in arms. They sought the aid of authority and demanded the arrest of the offending sachem. Krent-poos straightway gathered his people about him and decamped. The agent, recognizing the provocation and inclined to leniency, granted the Modocs permission to remain off the reservation so long as no complaints were registered against them by the white settlers.

For a time there was quiet; then complaints began to flow in: the Modocs were raiding the herds; trampling the grain fields; waylaying lone travelers; in fact, doing everything that good Indians should not do. The agent sent for Krent-poos and questioned him. The chief denied all charges; the Klamaths, he said, were committing these outrages in Modoc territory, and his innocent people were receiving the blame. Moreover, he added, he could account for the activities of all his band except a few unruly members who, under the leadership of a young buck known as "the Curly-headed Doctor," refused to submit to his rule. For the time, the agent was satisfied. Krent-poos returned to his lodge.

Now came the tragedy which was to desolate not only the life of Krent-poos, the chieftain, but the lives of many innocent and friendly souls, both white and red. There were among the white settlers some who might be termed Indian haters. A party of these, under a Captain Jackson, decided to visit punishment upon the Modocs. Accordingly, just at daybreak one morning, they surrounded the Indian encampment. When the settlement was completely encircled, these volunteers fired a volley that riddled the tepees. Caught unawares, many times outnumbered, the Modocs refused to surrender, though the whites promised immunity if they would lay down their arms. Krent-poos and his people, alas! had little reason to trust the word of the paleface. Twenty-one years before, a similar scene had been enacted and a similar promise given. The Indians had then accepted the offer in good faith, to discover too late that the promised immunity meant death for many of their number. With this memory bitter in their hearts, is it any wonder that the redskins were resolved to fight to the end?

Following this refusal, Captain Jackson and his men poured volley upon volley into the ranks of the Indians. Finally, the latter managed to elude the besiegers and seek refuge in the hills, but not until many of their number had been killed, more wounded.

Krent-poos himself was wounded,

but his unhappy career was not to end after so brief a trial. His real tragedy was yet to follow.

This disaster so fired the fierce hearts of the Curly-headed Doctor and his followers that these hot-blooded young bucks left the main party of the Modocs and returned to wreak vengeance on the whites for the wrongs that they and their people felt they had suffered. The vindictive savages attacked at midnight a little community not far from the raised and deserted Indian encampment. Mad with the sight of the blood shed by their brothers, they were frightful in their ferocity. Every white man encountered was murdered without quarter. Buildings were razed. Crops were destroyed. The damage done, the blood shed, in less than four hours, was appalling. But, though there were a number of women and children in the village, all these were spared. In this the red man showed greater leniency than had the supposedly civilized warriors earlier in the day.

From this raid on the now panic-stricken whites, the Curly-headed Doctor returned to the main band of the Modocs—and to their chief. Proudly he recounted his just deeds of revenge. And it was plain to be seen that the hearts of the tribe were with him. Only Krent-poos, wounded and heart-sick, counseled peace. Always it was his desire to live amicably with his white brothers, to develop his tribal government and civilization along lines parallel to theirs. In his soul he knew the wisdom of peace—his ideal was peace. No coward he, but he wished to avoid the inevitable disaster that awaited his people should they pit their strength against the forces of the whites.

The danger to Krent-poos and his people was not long in making itself felt. The terrified white settlers, thoroughly aroused by the Modoc attack, called in the aid of the nearest garrison of soldiers. Krent-poos and his braves thereupon took refuge in the vast lava fields of the Oregon country. These fastnesses are practically impregnable, and here, at least, the harassed chieftain was safe for a time.

Withdrawn into these wilds, Krent-poos became ever more solemn and morose. He seemed devoured by an unconquerable melancholy. Deaf to the demands of the braves, he refused to take the warpath. His strong convictions of right and wrong would not allow him to so offend his principles of peace. Finally, by his young sister, Princess Mary, he sent a message of despair to the agency, pleading his cause.

"I am very sad," he said. "I want peace quick—or else let the soldiers make haste and fight. My wound is nearly well, but I am afraid of the soldiers on the road. I cannot give up my people to be hanged. I could give up my horse to be hanged, and I should not weep. But if I give my men to a death that kills both body and soul, then I must weep. I have given up my land. Now let the soldiers disperse and I will agree to any terms—only my men I cannot surrender. Think how you would feel in this matter—and understand."

This note expresses the Indian superstition that hanging killed not only the body but the soul as well. The red men believed that since by the ignominious noose the throat was closed, the breath—that is, the spirit—could not escape to the Happy Hunting Grounds in the country of the Great Father.

Krent-poos' pathetic plea aroused only suspicion in the minds of those he sought to placate, and his expressed desire for peace seemed but a blind for some warlike ruse. Princess Mary was sent back to her brother with the stern demand for an unqualified surrender—and this Krent-poos could not give and maintain his honor.

The warriors, under the leadership of the Curly-headed Doctor, now began to heap insults upon the crushed and broken chieftain. One morning, the climax of this campaign of persecution was reached. To Krent-poos, seated apart on a huge rock, came the braves of the tribe; and in their hands they bore the garments of a squaw. These they set upon the mighty frame of the sachem. On his head they placed the ignominious crown of a squaw's bonnet. Then circling about him, they mocked him, spat upon him; called him woman, coward, weakling, puma with a coyote's heart. And Krent-poos, sitting on his stone, his shamed head in his hands, paid no heed to the gibes and abusive epithets. Then just at noon, through the clouds crept a ray of sunshine. And, with the sun, some hidden fire blazed in the heart of Krent-poos, and he sprang erect, rent the garments of ridicule from his shoulders, and trampled them under his feet. A flame almost of madness burned in his sunken eyes.

"You say you want war," he thundered. "You shall have war! And Krent-poos will not be the one to ask for peace!"

Then the braves whirled about him in the intricacies of the war dance—and the heart of Krent-poos which had been good toward the whites turned against them. From that moment until his capture, Krent-poos lived only to fulfil his oath of battle.

Soon after this thrilling scene, a party of foresighted men in the white settlement decided to parley with the red men in their own stronghold. Accordingly, Judge Steele of Yreka, California, long a friend of the Indians and an arbitrator of Indian disputes, was selected to act as messenger to Krent-poos. A day was set for the council, and at the appointed time a group of these pacifists entered the lava fields.

In grave silence Krent-poos and five of his warriors received the guests. Among the latter were Mr. Canby, well known as the friend of the Indians, and Mr. Meacham, the sympathetic agent of the reservation. The council progressed badly. The whites wished peace and were willing to meet any reasonable terms of the redskins. But the terms were not reasonable. The excited savages demanded the return of all the land they had once held. When the spokesman of the palefaces tried to explain the difficulty of obtaining the same region and promised equal territory in another place, the red men failed to comprehend. They believed that their requests were meeting with refusal.

Suddenly, one of the more hot-headed seized a musket and fired upon the arbitrators. Pandemonium reigned at once. The whites made a break for their horses—all but one escaped, though several were wounded. Mr. Canby was killed. Krent-poos attempted to stay this would-be butchery of the ambassadors—but to no avail.

Upon the heels of this outrage the Indians left the lava fields and began a series of devastating raids upon lonely ranches and homesteads. Through all, Krent-poos enforced one rigid rule: all women and children were spared; not one was harmed in any of the raids that occurred.

Suddenly, for some unknown reason, Krent-poos had a violent quarrel with a warrior named "Hooker" Jim. In this quarrel the entire tribe participated—and by far the greater number held to the standard of Hooker Jim. The band divided, each faction following its chosen leader.

Hooker Jim and his party were apparently displeased with the course of the war they had fostered; at any rate they, at the price of immunity for themselves, laid information with the white authorities as to the whereabouts of

Krent-poos and his men. The whites were then able to round-up those of the Modocs who had remained loyal to Krent-poos. Only the chieftain and three of his braves escaped from the net.

But the career of Krent-poos was ended. The forces against him were too strong. He was run to earth at last and compelled to surrender. His defeat was the more bitter because his own people had betrayed him. His life had been given to their service, and now in his extremity they not only deserted him, but after he was captured, declared that he was insane and merited only death.

When the capturing posse brought him into the settlement, he was greeted with derision. Vile epithets and jeers were hurled at him by exulting Klamaths. The whites rejoiced in his downfall. But Krent-poos stood apart, dignified and melancholy, a warrior and a hero for all his tattered blanket. His stern, proud face, his sad, deep-sunken eyes, his whitening hair, told the story of his anguish. But no murmur escaped him; he drank his cup of gall and wormwood in the silence of despair.

Krent-poos was brought to trial for his life. He told the story of his wrong, denying none of the allegations against him, justifying none of his acts, admitting his full guilt. He seemed preoccupied, concerned only with the fact of his failure to attain his own ideal of pacifism. No man ever bore with greater nobility the tremendous burden of his evil deeds—no maan ever suffered from keener remorse, from sharper sense of failure. As Krent-poos told of the pressure that was brought to bear upon him—the demands made upon him by his own people—the conflicting demands made upon him by the whites—his struggle to maintain peace—and of his weakening before a force too strong for even his great spirit, his voice failed him. The judge, in sympathy with his emotion, adjourned the court until the next day.

Krent-poos refused to talk thereafter, and when the verdict was brought in and the sentence of death pronounced, he bowed his head to the inevitable. Three days later he was led to the scaffold.

In serene majesty he mounted the steps. From behind the stockade rose the wailing of his prisoned people. The Klamaths who had assembled to gloat over the vanquished foeman were strangely silent. In an ominous and brooding stillness the noose was tightened and the trap dropped. Then from the throats of five hundred Klamaths rose a long-drawn cry of horror and fear. The piercing notes rose higher, shriller, and died away into ghostly echoes. Silently, Klamaths and whites together slipped away. Enemies though they were, their very souls were shaken at the sight of a brave man meeting nobly the most ignoble death.

Krent-poos was like a mighty oak which, too strong to bend to the storm, must break before its fury. These lines from a poem by Carl Sandburg form a fitting epitaph for Krent-poos—pacifist—warrior:

The peace of great mountains be for you,
The sleep and the eyesight of eagles,
Sheet mist shadows and the long look across!

Three on the Trail

By Max Brand

Synopsis of Preceding Chapters

JAMES GERALDI, fleeing from Chalmers, an angry hotel keeper, is sheltered by Louise Asprey. Her "Cousin Edgar" hints at a large reward for one who would serve him. Geraldi bluntly refuses, but suggests Dick Renney.

Louise's father, Robert, has killed a man and escaped from jail. His daughter believes he still lives. Edgar has complete control of her father's affairs and dominates her mother. Geraldi agrees to seek Robert. He trails Renney and saves Robert's life. Edgar's baseness is revealed. Robert goes to seek pardon from the governor.

Mrs. Asprey becomes engaged to Edgar. Louise despairs. Geraldi returns, gives her a letter from Robert for his wife, and goes to rejoin Robert. In Mexican disguise he stops at a hotel and gambles with some local politicians, Green, the man behind the governor, among them. The cards are marked, but Geraldi skillfully foils the cheats. Renney arrives and Green interviews him.

Renney's eagerness to block Robert's pardon betrays him. Green suspects Edgar's connection with the affair and demands seventy-five thousand dollars. Renney had hoped that twenty of the fifty thousand dollars Edgar allowed him to get the pardon refused would suffice.

CHAPTER XXX.

A FRIEND OF HIS.

IT was, to the little gunman, like the twitching of a fortune from his hand. He saw ten or fifteen thousand dollars jerked from his pocket and tossed out of his reach—into the lap of this fat man.

Pale green grew his eyes as he stared at the politician.

Then: "Unlock the door," he said, "I'm gunna go."

He waited, furious, certain that this would call the bluff. To his amazement, Joe Green deliberately went to the door and unlocked it, waving the gunman out.

"Sorry we couldn't do business," he said.

Not often in his life had Renney been so impressed. He stalked from the chamber, but at the door he whirled again and shook his fist at Smiling Joe.

"You poor sap," he cried, "fifty thousand was his top figure, and he was a fool for offering that much."

"Fifty thousand?" said Joe Green. "Very well. We'll close at that."

Renney, hanging at the doorway, could not believe his ears.

"I simply wanted to be sure of his top notch," said Smiling Joe. "It would have been foolish of me to throw good money away, wouldn't it?"

Something about the foxlike brightness of his eyes made Renney turn black with disappointment and with hate. He even felt fear. He saw that he had been overreached from every side.

"I never knew before how you could run this here State by the gift of gab," he admitted sullenly, coming back into the room. "I see now. You never throw away no tricks."

"Very few, I hope," said Joe Green. "I was raised in a thrifty home, Renney. I was a seventh child of a poor widow, Renney, and I have to bless her for the training that she gave me!"

"Aw, shut up!" growled the disgusted Renney. "Save that for the election, will you? I ain't a voter."

"On the contrary," said Smiling Joe. "You're a big voter, and I believe that you've cast every one of the fifty thousand votes you control in my favor."

"I wish that I'd cut my throat, sooner," protested the other.

"Of course you do! Of course you do," said Smiling Joe. "At the same time, you may forget that I'm a man who never goes back on a friend. Once inside the door you may stay in my house forever, my boy. And I think that this evening ought to make you my friend."

Slowly, with a wrench of his feelings, Renney stepped to the other side of the fence. He could cease scowling. This connection, for all he knew, might be the saving of his neck more than once. And of late he had been having apprehensions of an early downfall. The champion pugilist stretched on the floor by a despised amateur could not have felt more than Renney had felt when he was so completely outplayed by Geraldi.

So he looked upon Joe Green with a greater favor and even was able to smile a little.

"Maybe we better call it that," he suggested.

"Maybe we better," admitted Smiling Joe. "And now suppose that we clean up the details."

"What can you get out of me now?" asked Renney in some alarm.

"Don't worry, my boy. I never bleed a friend. Let me tell you something more. If this deal goes through—the minute the cash is paid in to me, five thousand of it goes straight back to you for a commission."

Renney opened his eyes very wide.

"By Jiminy!" he gasped.

"I know a friend," repeated Joe Green, clinching his point. "You're going to be one of us, my boy. I'm going to hold you up if you break!"

In fact, Smiling Joe began to grow mellow. He was seeing the disposition of that money as a farmer sees a growing crop. Three thousand to Mullaley, who was yammering for more coin. Ten thousand into the fund. Five thousand for the new wing he had been promising his wife to add to the house. Eight thousand to Jermin, the editor, because Jermin was a "good fellow" whose newspapers almost carried the State in their own weight. Then he could throw a comfortable ten thousand into his checking account, and there would still be nearly ten thousand left for secret and private disposal. He could afford to give Renney the five. Besides, his active mind saw the places where he could fit in just such a servant of the machine—a man to be called on once in five years perhaps—when a vacancy in the opposition would be most welcome.

All this ground he had covered in his rapid thoughts. He saw that he had Renney in the palm of his hand. Now he went on to prepare for the work.

"You know about that killing?"

"Yes."

"Was Robert Asprey drunk that night?"

"He'd had a few drinks."

"Was he drunk?"

"Well, no. He shot too straight for that."

"Very well. He shot too straight for that. What had the Mexican been doing?"

"Cheating at cards, of course."

"Why was Asprey playing with such a sneak?"

"He made a fifth hand."

Smiling Joe winced. He, also, had invited in a "fifth hand" that very evening.

"And then?"

"He tried a raw job."

"How raw?"

"Aces out."

"Not that!"

"He did. He could palm them. He was slick."

"And Asprey?"

"Asprey found it out."

"And went for him?"

"No; the little snake, when he was caught, went at Asprey like poison in the eyes."

"And then?"

"Asprey knocked him away and shot him dead."

Smiling Joe closed his eyes.

"For doing that," he said at length, "he ought to have had a statue put up to him in the town square."

"Sure he should," agreed Renney, "but there wouldn't have been anything in that for us."

"No sooner said than done," remarked the genial Joe Green. "I have this case, now. How did they ever get Robert Asprey, in the first place, for this job?"

"They tried railroading him. But they might have failed. Probably they would have. But he got worried and broke jail."

Smiling Joe whistled through thick lips.

"Well, well, well," said he. "And if this man Bob Asprey gets to the governor—what shape is he in now?"

"Looks like he was built of rock. He's all man."

"Sour and mean?"

"Him? No, open-minded as a baby. He oughta been a banker. He's that sympathetic."

"Let's have all this from the beginning. How do you figure in?"

"I was to mop out Bob Asprey."

"And?"

"I had him under my gun, when a slick young cat of a man, he come in between me and him."

"Somebody beat you, Renney?"

"From behind."

"And he's still in the way?"

"He's still in the way."

"Worries you, my boy?"

Renney paused. He considered Joe Green gravely, and decided that the man was too important to be fed with a lie.

"Him and Asprey between them. They're a handful."

"Why don't you get help?"

"Nothing but a topnotcher would be any use to me," admitted Renney sadly.

"And you haven't any on hand?"

"Six months is an old friend for me," admitted Renney with a sour grin. "Gents get moldy on me, pretty quick."

Mr. Green thought again, deeply.

"What's the name of this fellow?"

"Him? Geraldi. He's a panther!"

"He would rather crowd the stage," observed Joe Green. "He might even get on our tracks?"

"Him? He can smell out a trail a hundred miles away. Listen! He followed me on the train. I dropped off in a gorge. Middle of night. Backtrailed to the next town. He was there! I got him jailed, took another train. He was there. I shot him off the top of that train and saw him drop over the side. He must've hooked into a window. Anyway, when I got to Asprey he was there with me. That's the story

of him. He reads the mind of a lock and he—shot the gun out of my hand."

"Intentionally?"

"*In*-tentionally!" insisted the other.

Smiling Joe no longer smiled, and his face turned severe. But illumination came to him suddenly.

"I have a little thought," said he. "What's the best way to fight fire?"

"With fire," said the crook.

"Is this Geraldi fire?"

"Nothing but."

"Well, my lad, come along with me. I've got another of Geraldi's kind. He's in the next room. The slipperiest young lad that ever walked, and the smoothest, and he talks a gun out of thin air. Come along and meet him. He'll make your running mate!"

So it was that Geraldi saw the door of his room open, a moment later, and the fat Joe Green enter, and behind him, the familiar, catlike form of Renney.

From the midst of a careless, friendly game of Twenty-one he observed Renney, and Renney observed him. He saw the gunman stiffen, like a cat at the sight of a dog. But then the hand of Renney rose, empty. He scratched his chin.

"Hey, kid," said Smiling Joe. "I want you to meet an old friend of mine. This is Dick Renney!"

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE POWER BEHIND.

THE son of a rich man, Governor Thomas Fuller was determined that this accident of birth should not destroy his activities. He was keenly ambitious. His ambitions drew him in two ways: toward his library and toward the speaker's platform. As a matter of fact, most of his waking hours always had been spent among his books. He rose early; he labored late. He dressed without vanity; his table was frugal; his manners were simple. And he was proud to say that his millions had not kept him from living on equal terms with his poorer neighbors. He rubbed shoulders willingly with any one. He was fond of speaking of the brotherhood of man. He endowed an orphan's home. He contributed to the establishment of a hospital. Constantly his purse was opened privately, secretly, to succor the distressed. He looked upon himself as a man of the people.

Of course, as always happens in such cases, the simplicity of his manners simply made more apparent the gulf between him and the majority of the other citizens in his State. He was simple from philosophical conviction; they were simple because they had spent most of their years punching cows, digging in mines, cutting timber. His very vocabulary, thrice refined toward the golden end of simplicity, was so pure that other men were touched with awe. The people who crossed the threshold of his home caught their breath. They knew that Thomas Fuller had fifteen millions in unassailable bonds and lands. No matter what he did, they were determined to see a difference.

He was gentle, kind, and good. He never had injured any man. He labored with all his might to stand merely on a level with his fellows. Because of the very honesty of that ambition, wolves fell upon him.

At first he wanted to be a member of no party, but merely to throw his weight behind good government, no matter who represented it. But the instant that he appeared in support of a candidate—it was merely for mayor of the town—the opposition press attacked him savagely.

They called him "idle rich," "cold-blooded aristocrat," "cunning, and plausible corrupter of the legislative body," "the representative of big business, crushing smaller people." They cartooned him; they lampooned him. They searched into his past and coined lies about him.

Because he was a faultless man, the attack was all the more bitter. We hate those whom we have harmed, and every man who lifted a hand against Thomas Fuller knew that he was wrong; that he lied. Therefore, their bitterness knew no bound.

Thomas Fuller took these attacks seriously to heart. He used to sit in the evening in his library with a desk piled with papers and, with compressed lips and an aching heart, he read every diatribe. He tried to be just and reasonable and, with a humble spirit, seek for truth in the voices of his detractors. But the truth of their assaults was only a phantom.

There was never one pile of papers. There always were two. The first was the press which assailed him. The second represented those who supported his side.

Furiously as the enemy attacked him, just so furiously the friendly journals defended him. The enemy dreaded the weight of his name, his wealth; the other party which he had happened to advocate in that first petty election prized him for exactly the same reasons.

It was his fifteen millions that made the difference.

Because of those millions, his single speech to a meeting in the town hall placed him in the center of the political stage. He had wanted to belong to no party. But after two weeks the Conservatives had burned him with gas, with fire, and with acid, so that he never could approach them as a friend. and after two weeks, the Liberals had salved his hurts and bandaged his wounds so thoroughly that ever to have left them would, to the sensitive soul of Thomas Fuller, have been something akin to black treason.

He withdrew from politics. That is to say, he tried to withdraw. But the two parties would not let him. The Liberals had won, therefore the Conservatives would not cease their attacks. And the Liberals dared not cease from their defense.

Presently his name was known in every far corner of the State, and people began to ask questions. Every Liberal loved the name of Thomas Fuller without knowing why. Every Conservative hated him, and did not know why.

The Liberals pointed to his charities. The Conservatives shouted: "Hypocrite!"

In the meantime, he read the papers and bled inwardly, and inwardly was healed.

They begged him to run for the State senate.

He accepted from curiosity rather than from eagerness. For four years he sat quietly and listened to scurrilous debates. He was denounced on the floor. Foaming politicians shook their fists at him. On the other hand, fiery Liberals rose and defended him, eulogized him.

He spoke only five times in four years. But every word he uttered made a headline, not because it was important but because he was a keenly interesting political point. In the meantime, he was a theme every day of every session.

Finally, he could not help feeling that Conservatives were a little mad and a little wicked. And he could not help feeling that Liberals were kind and true. Also, he was led naturally to the belief that his political sagacity was beyond that of most men. Seriously—when he saw all his speeches thrashed out in detail in the papers—he felt that there was something in his thoughts. And that led him, almost reluctantly, to the conclusion that he owed his time and his mind to the State.

The instant that his conscience was entrapped, the thing was done. He gave the rest of his days to politics.

Twice he toured the State and made speeches. He never was eloquent. But

his slow sentences, his simple words, his gentle manner delighted the Liberals. He had become so well known that they were sure he must be brilliant. He could not smile without making the audience shout with laughter. He could not raise his hand without reducing them to stark, expectant silence.

The Conservatives were just as violent against him. Four times they raided his house and broke up his meetings. And this made his importance grow greater. The Conservative press used all its adjectives on one side; the Liberal press began to compare him with Solon, and Alfred the Great, and Washington. They declared that he had a silver tongue and a golden heart. No praise was too much!

And Thomas Fuller believed them—just a little.

A time came when the Liberals were in distress for a candidate for governor. The last man they had in office had been frankly corrupt, a machine politician. Another of the same stamp would be buried in an election. So they decided to take a last, desperate chance.

They felt that Thomas Fuller was incorruptible and most of the political Liberal bosses were far from wanting an incorruptible in the office. Nevertheless, the party was desperate. They nominated Thomas Fuller.

Every Liberal voted for him furiously. Every Conservative voted furiously against him. Between the two extremes lay a small body of honest, comparatively indifferent people. They, also, voted for Fuller, and he was elected by the thinnest of margins.

By the thinnest of margins his party controlled the assembly; its hold in the senate was equally small; but, nevertheless, the control of the government was in his hands.

Then the party consulted. It would not do to let him have full sway. Otherwise, in a year he would spend every penny in the treasury in building schools and roads and hospitals, or in reclaiming arid lands, or in other schemes which did not line political pockets fast enough to suit the rank and file of the bosses.

Then Smiling Joe Green remembered that he had gone to school with the governor. It was in the East, a school which Joe had hated. His career had been infamous in the classroom, and glorious on the football field. Now he proposed to recall himself to the governor's attention—and perhaps——

It succeeded better than he could have dreamed.

The governor greeted an old school fellow with rapture. Because Joe was a Liberal, he was sure in the first place that he was a good fellow, and before he had conversed with him an hour, he was sure that Joe was a genius.

Colonel Green knew nearly half the voters in the State by name; he knew every town, village, crossroads hotel. And for this knowledge, it came to pass that the governor looked upon him as a man of immense ability. He could not have dreamed that it had been acquired merely for the sake of lining the colonel's pockets with political loot. Thomas Fuller was so honest that he could not imagine that another man really was crooked. He began to ask the advice of Joe Green.

Joe Green gave advice without seeming to.

He had a mind like a moving picture. Whatever had come to his attention was his forever. He had only to turn back to the right film. Whenever he wanted to make a point, he reminded the governor of something that gentleman had said in a speech or in an article. He always seemed to be suggesting what the governor already had determined upon.

Finally, Thomas Fuller became convinced that the only purpose of these conversations with Colonel Green was for the clearing of his own mind. As a matter of fact, he had delivered him-

self into the hands of an unscrupulous grafter.

In a few quarters, it became known. When something was needed, men approached Joe Green. He began to grow fat in purse. Whatever he wanted was done, and all the time Thomas Fuller's hands were as clean as snow and his self-confidence was increasing. The opposition began to speak of his graft administration. He merely smiled, because he knew himself. They began to rage at his brazen face. It was only the brazen face of utter innocence.

All this must be understood before we step with Smiling Joe Green through the front door of the governor's home on the bright morning of the next day, and watch him saunter down the hall, and see him tap on the door of the governor's library.

Three quick taps, a pause, and a louder one.

"Come in, Joe Green!" calls the governor. "Come in, Joe. How happy I always am to hear your knock!"

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE POWER MAKES ITSELF FELT.

THE morning was so warm that the governor sat between two open windows. A broad shaft of sun fell through one and made the floor almost as bright as a surface of amber water. By contrast, the governor was a shadow among shadows, except that there was a glint of silver, which was his hair.

"Sit down, Joe. I have to tell you about an adventure."

Smiling Joe had cloaked his face in gloom; he now, apparently, forced a smile of interest.

"Every day's an adventure in your office," he suggested.

"A nocturnal adventure," smiled the governor. "A man, in fact, forced his way into my house."

"They've hired another gunman, then!" exclaimed Smiling Joe.

"Hired one? No."

"Forced his way in," went on Smiling Joe in great excitement. "By heaven, that watchman! I've never liked the look of him!"

"I'm sure it was not the fault of the watchman."

"You never will place blame on any one," said Smiling Joe. "But you must remember, sir, that you don't belong to yourself. You're State property! If you'll let me find you a real fighting man——"

"I wouldn't displace poor Bender," said the governor. "Besides, he's not blameable. This man who broke in was a very resolute fellow. You may have heard of Robert Asprey?"

"The murderer!" exclaimed Smiling Joe, with force and with horror. "The murderer, Asprey?"

"Come, come!" murmured Thomas Fuller. "That's a very harsh word, isn't it?"

"Ah!" Green nodded. "He played the honest man with you, did he?"

"*Played* the honest man?" repeated the governor.

"He can do that, too," replied Green. "I know all about him!"

The governor sighed.

"I hope I haven't made a mistake," said he.

"Not about Asprey," said Green earnestly. "That would be a serious matter. There's not a more dangerous man in the State, than that fellow, I should say."

Thomas Fuller sighed again.

"I know that he's the father of a charming girl. I know that he built a respectable home, Joe. Surely those things are in his favor."

Smiling Joe nodded.

"He's put his best foot forward with you, I see," said he. "No doubt he talked about 'political' enemies; 'railroading,' and such things?"

"As a matter of fact," admitted the governor, "that's exactly what he said.

But if you'd heard the conviction and the manner of his speaking——"

His voice trailed away a little. He waited for Green to speak, but the latter remained discreetly silent.

At length the governor added rather weakly: "I've promised him a pardon."

"Good Heaven!" broke out Green in horror.

"Ah?" queried the governor.

"I beg your pardon," muttered Green, and frowned at the floor.

"My dear Joe, you seem quite cut up over this."

"I? Well—it will be rather ugly. And we can't afford to throw away many votes, can we?"

"I should think," answered Fuller, "that this is the very sort of thing that would be popular."

"Pardons usually are," said the other. "But, of course, people are a little tired of seeing the gunmen go free. There was Chandler, last month, too."

The governor bit his lip.

"I have taken an oath," said he, "to do my duty as I see it before me."

"And of course you do it," replied Green. "I hope, sir, that I'm not the man to doubt that.

"Don't 'sir' me, Joe."

"It slips out, Tom. I can't help it. I've formed a habit of looking up to you, I suppose."

"Tush!" said the governor, smiling with pleasure in spite of himself. "Well, well, well! But really, I take Robert Asprey to be as honest a man as I've ever talked with in my life. I saw his daughter not long ago and liked her. Now I've seen the father—at my own request. And I've given him my promise."

Joe Green drew a great breath, but he was silent.

"Why do you take it so very seriously?" asked Fuller, with a touch of impatience.

"Perhaps you're right," said Green. "You're a better judge of human nature than I am, of course."

"I don't think I am," said the governor in haste. "I don't think that's at all true. Besides, I don't know anything about the story—except a vague recollection."

"Asprey told you, I suppose?"

"Yes."

"He made it out—what?"

"According to him, it was a simple affair. The Mexican was a known gambler, and a crooked one. I believe he palmed an ace and Asprey caught him out. After that, he flew at Asprey's throat, and the man fired in self-defense."

Joe Green shook his head, smiling his doubt. Then he began to nod, as though he were seeing through the matter.

"It's plain that you don't like this," said Thomas Fuller.

"Sorry, sir," said Green.

"Do come out in the open with me, Joe."

"I was simply remembering that Robert Asprey ran away from prison. He wouldn't even wait for the verdict of the jury."

"He explained that. There was a great deal of enmity toward him at the time——"

"Wasn't the trial in his home town?"

"I believe so. Yes."

"So many enemies in his own town? That sounds rather bad, doesn't it?"

"Ah, Joe," answered Fuller, "think of the number of enemies I have in this very city!"

"There's a difference between a man of your caliber and his, I hope," said Green angrily. "I tell you, Tom, you do wrong by taking every man for what he ought to be rather than for what he is! By heavens, that you should calmly sit there and compare yourself with a drunken, brawling, murdering——"

He stopped short and pressed one hand over his mouth.

"I'm sorry that I went so far, Tom."

The governor interlocked his fingers and leaned back in his chair.

"Speak as if you were in my place, Joe," said he. "Suppose that I'm Robert Asprey. I've come into this room where you, the governor, sit. I've asked you to give me another chance to prove to the world that I'm an honest man!"

Joe Green hesitated.

"I think I could answer best out of your own mouth, Tom."

"My own mouth?"

"I remember the speech that you made at Bentley Crossing two years ago."

"That was after the fight at the mines."

"Right! It was your speech that day which ended the rioting even more effectually than if you'd called out the militia."

"No, no," smiled the pleased governor. "As a matter of fact——"

"I know what I'm talking about," said Joe Green. "That day you said—the words still ring in my ear—'the law is no man's private possession. A man may put a revolver into his pocket, but he cannot put the law into his pocket. There will be no peace and there will be no order in this country until the citizens realize that justice must not be left for courtrooms only; it must walk the streets, and our men must have empty hands!"

Joe Green paused and shook his head in admiration.

"Do you remember how they cheered when you said that?"

"Did they? Did they cheer, Joe?" murmured the governor, blushing like a girl.

"They split the roof wide open," said Joe Green unthruthfully. "And they had reason to. They were listening to a man talk, that day. And I tell you, Tom, it hurts me, it hurts me most terribly to think of you falling beneath yourself, beneath what you can be! It hurts me still more when I think of how the yellow press will yell at you. They've never had anything to go on before except blind malice. But now they can shout about inconsistency, and of course, they'll be sure that you were bribed to grant the pardon."

The governor caught his breath.

"I hadn't thought of that!" he said faintly.

"Because your heart is too pure——"

"No, no!"

"Your hands are too clean and your soul——"

"Come, come, Joe!"

"And your mercy too ready——"

"Joe, don't talk up to me. I'm just a fellow like yourself, and not a whit better."

"Like me? If you were like me, do you think that cowardly murderer, that red-handed sneak, would have dared to come into this house and suggest that I pardon him. No, but he knew that he could take advantage of you. He knew that you have no memory even for crimes against yourself, and, therefore, you wouldn't have the full story at the end of your fingers. You would not know about the wife and the children of the poor fellow that Asprey murdered!"

"Children?" said the governor, touched and excited.

"Five children," said Joe Green.

He added, absently: "Of course, this will cost us every Mexican vote in the place. But let them go. I'd rather see the Conservatives come in and smash all the work we've tried to do these last few years—I'd rather see that happen than to ask you to change your mind unless you see good and honest reason for changing it!"

"Reason?" cried the governor. "Good heavens, my dear lad, what more reason do I want than this? When he comes back to-night, I'll denounce him to his face and send him off!"

CHAPTER XXXIII.

IT MUST WIN.

SMILING JOE did not linger in the house of the governor. He had other work on hand, and, therefore, he left and drove his span of fast-stepping bays down the street to the telegraph office. There he sent to Edgar Asprey a telegram consisting of a single word: "Arranged." He signed the telegram "Joe." Such a document would be slender evidence in any court—even supposing that Asprey was not wise enough to destroy it. In the meantime, it should prove enough to start fifty thousand dollars on its way toward him.

No wonder Smiling Joe was living up to his nickname when he walked out of the telegraph office and stood for a moment at the edge of the gutter, rubbing his hands together, and regarding life in a wholly favorable manner.

Then he climbed to the seat of his buggy and sent the bays rattling out of town, and spinning down the boulevard which fringed the lake. It was not well paved, and it was bordered by more lank, brown fields than by houses. Nevertheless, he looked upon it complacently, for he told himself that before many years the city must have grown out here and then this naked land would have hundredfold value.

The point of his vision was that he owned most of those brown fields. That would be the time for him to retire—when these fields came into the market as tidy city lots!

In the meantime, he had two deadly weapons cached in the hills beyond the lake. He saw a fit employment for them at once.

So he gave his horses the whip, and they sped rapidly around the edge of the little lake, rang their hollow hoofbeats on the ridge across the creek, and then fell to a walk as they worked up the steeper slope beyond.

The mind of the fat man was not seeing that dusty highway, but a sheet of well-graded, sweeping macadam which, in time, would pierce the heart of the mountains and double and redouble the population of the capital city.

For he loved that little city by the lake, with a greater love than he himself understood, and always, when he had spare moments—when he lay stretched in his bed at night, and when he opened his eyes in the morning—he was turning the bright, dim pages of the future and reading glowing words into them about the town. If he had found a mountain of gold, he would have given half of it, perhaps, to the city.

He turned the horses from the main roadway, and drove, still at a walk, down a little lane which was hardly more than a treble cattle trail, faintly marked on either side by wheels, and trampled in the center by the passage of hoofs. But wild grass sprang up in between.

A sudden chatter of guns ahead of him made him draw in his reins. However, if there were gun work, he was not the object of it. He reached under the seat, and raised to the place beside him a sawed-off shot gun. He was no marksman, but that gun needed no marksmanship. Any one who could hit a lawn with a stream of water from a hose could hit a mark with that spray of terrible lead.

He passed through a high hedge of brush—beneath him he saw a horseman galloping at full speed.

It was Renney on a plunging horse, a gun in hand, and in a moment the gun began to speak. Six times he fired; then reined in his horse and hastened to examine a small tree which had been his target. The new-found ally of Renney, the splendid, young Mexican rancher-card-player-gunman, went along, and the politician heard them announce the result. Out of six bullets, fired at almost full speed, Renney actually had driven two into the mark, and there was

a scratch on the bark which, after argument, was not allowed.

Smiling Joe regarded this display with a shuddering horror, for it was uncanny skill. Doubtless every one of the six shots, even if they had not cut through the small trunk, would have passed through a human body.

The young Mexican now whirled his gray mare. A word to her, spoken in a strange language, and she shot across the sloping meadow, and as she flew, the rider fired rapidly. One explosion followed veritably on the heels of another. And when the examination was made, four bullets were found to have whipped straight through the trunk of the sapling. A gust of wind caught at its branches during the examination, and so closely had the bullets of the last rider been bunched, that the young tree snapped loudly and fell with a *whish*.

"Kid," said Renney with grudging admiration, "you got the trick. You got it! Dashed if I ain't out of practice!"

"There's luck in every deal like this," replied the other carelessly. And then big Joe Green hailed them.

They came to him with a whoop and a rush. Renney was plainly eager; the Mexican showed perfect indifference in his scarred face.

"Bob Asprey won't be pardoned, boys," said Smiling Joe with a broad grin. "There ain't any chance of that, but there is a chance of something else. He's due to come to the governor's house to-night at ten. Well, there ain't any reason why the pair of you shouldn't be there, is there?"

"What sort of a lay is the governor's house?" asked Renney.

"Easy, kid, easy. There's a garden in front, and an alley behind. The alley for your horses. The garden for you. You sit out there in the cool and wait for your man."

"Ain't there a watchman or something like that?"

"That watchman will be fixed by me. Besides, he's an old fool who's half blind. Renney, I think I've put him in your hands."

Renney asked curiously: "Will you tell me, chief, what makes you so keen to kill Bob Asprey?"

"Thorough is my word, son," answered the politician. "And dead men don't vote. I guess that's all!"

He turned his horses, the tire of the near front wheel scraping with a screech against the guard iron. Then down the road he trotted his span. Soon he disappeared, and left only an occasionally rising wisp of dust above the green.

Then Renney turned to his younger companion.

"There's a slick one, kid. Slick for any country!"

"In my land," said Geraldi, "we would make him a general."

"Sure," answered Renney, "because in your country the generals get the loot. What time is it?"

"Nearly twelve."

"Do you know the town?"

"A little."

"Then take care of yourself. I'm going in past the lake. You better go in on the far side. I'll meet you in the alley behind the governor's house at nine. We'll plant the job then. So long, kid."

"Adios," said Geraldi.

He was glad to be rid of the gunman, but when Renney was out of sight, he did not ride down toward the town. Instead, he turned up across the high land, pointing straight toward the hotel, and, on the way, he entered the lofty grove of spruce. There he halted, whistled three times, and almost instantly had a brisk answer.

Robert Asprey stepped out from among the trees and waved a hand in cordial greeting.

He was smoking a pipe; utter content was in his eye.

"You're kind of late and tardy, my

boy," said Asprey. "I've waited here all morning for a sight of you."

"I've been with Renney," answered Geraldi.

"Renney!" cried the other. "Did you —was there a fight, Geraldi?"

"We're friends—we're working together," answered Geraldi.

The other simply stared.

"He gets twenty thousand for killing you," said Geraldi. "The political boss, Smiling Joe Green——"

"Colonel Green?"

"That's the man! He gets fifty thousand for stopping your pardon."

"He can't," said Robert Asprey with thorough content. "I have the governor's word for it."

"Is it fixed and final?"

"It will be to-night at ten."

"Green has seen the governor in the meantime and changed his mind."

"Impossible!"

"I've just heard him say so."

Robert Asprey reached for a tree and steadied himself. His teeth were set and his nostrils flaring, so that, for the moment, he looked a dangerous man indeed.

"A weak-hearted scoundrel, then! Is that what I have to think of Tom Fuller?"

"Think what you please," said Geraldi. "At ten o'clock to-night, I'm to be waiting in the garden in front of the governor's house with Renney, and you're to be our meat. Is that clear?"

"Nothing could be clearer," said Robert Asprey. "I'm beaten, then! What did they do? Bribe the governor? How could they bribe a man as rich as he is?"

"Green talked him over, probably. But that's all I can tell you. Now, what's the next move?"

"I don't know," said Asprey sadly. "I haven't the least idea. Fuller has fallen down on me!"

"We could try this," said Geraldi. "Go down at ten. I'll be there with Renney, and when he makes a move, I'll take him under my wing and go in behind you. We'll stand him up in front of Fuller and tell him the straight story, so far as we know it, about what Joe Green has done. I don't know. Perhaps that might win for us."

"It might win. It has to win," declared Robert Asprey. "But tell me first—does Edgar Asprey furnish all the money that's being spent on this affair?"

"Every penny—from your money."

"Money?" groaned the other. "Money is in the veins of these people, instead of blood. Geraldi, I don't see how we can win, but up yonder in the mountains I lived a long time alone, and I've learned to trust something greater than men."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

OUTSIDE.

AT nine o'clock, Geraldi rode Zuleikha into the entrance of the alley behind the governor's house. He dismounted, left her standing, and walked slowly ahead—slowly, because the surface of the alley was sadly pitted and rutted, and the narrow way was lost in almost total darkness.

Something shifted among the shadows before him, and Geraldi stepped under the shadow of a tree.

"Hello, kid!" called a cautious voice before him.

"Renney?"

The latter came up hastily.

"You're on time," he said.

"A shade ahead," said Geraldi.

"I've got a third man coming."

Geraldi bit his lip in the darkness.

"You'll spoil things with a crowd," said he.

"You're handy with a gun, kid," admitted Renney, "but with Asprey there's apt to be along a real trouble-maker. That's the Geraldi that I've been telling you about. I got a third man to help out.

"Who is he?"

"Somebody you never seen, probably. But don't worry about that. He's a game fellow and he shoots straight—and quick!"

He chuckled a little.

"He went straight, a few years ago. Ever since then, he's been hankering for some of the good, old times. He couldn't be hired when I asked him for this job. Think of it, old son! He's coming for the fun of it.!"

He chuckled again.

Then he added: "Where's your horse?"

"Down the alley."

"You better get her in closer."

"Very well."

Geraldi whistled softly, with a peculiar flare to the note. The mare trotted to him instantly.

"You got her so that she can talk back to you," said the gun fighter in admiration. "Come as far as she hears your whistle?"

"Yes. That far."

"She's worth her price."

"There's some one coming down the alley," whispered Geraldi.

They shrank back close against the fence.

"You got ears!" commented the gun fighter.

The stranger approached closer, coming slowly and more slowly.

At length he called gently: "Dick!"

"It's all right," called Renney in answer.

The figure strode on toward them. He loomed a big fellow before the eyes of Geraldi.

"Is everything set?" he asked in a rumbling bass voice which was very familiar to Geraldi.

"Everything," answered Renney.

"Where's your friend?"

"Here with me. This is Chalmers of Sankeytown, kid. Chalmers, this is the kid.

Their hands fumbled and found one another in the darkness.

"What's your name?" asked Chalmers.

Geraldi was silent.

He disliked very much having to speak. Renney would not suspect; he had seen Geraldi by day, in the new guise. He was already convinced that this was a friend. But Chalmers was very different, and, hearing that voice, he might hark straight back to the true identity of the speaker.

"He don't wear a name except on Sundays," explained Renney. "He's a good kid, Chalmers. I'll vouch for that."

"Now," said Chalmers, passing over the subject of Geraldi, "let's get to our places."

"Where's your horse?"

"Down the alley."

"You better get it closer."

Chalmers disappeared in haste into the darkness, and Renney added: "He's pretty short when he talks, but he don't mean no harm. Lately he's been upset by this same slick fellow, Geraldi. He ain't got much temper left with him, but give him plenty of rope and you can handle him right enough!"

Geraldi made no answer.

He liked this affair less and less. Renney alone was enough trouble for the day. To have the formidable bull, Chalmers, added to the fight, made it tenfold more difficult. But there was nothing to do except to lie low and wait. He must make his decisions about action at the last instant.

In the meantime, his plan with Robert Asprey was that the latter was to approach the house closer to nine thirty than ten, the time of the original appointment. In this manner, he would have a chance of slipping through unseen. Once he could face the governor, it seemed assured that honest Thomas Fuller must change his mind a second time.

In that case, there would be no trouble in the garden; Asprey could exit

when he wished, after impatience had driven the watchers away.

Chalmers came back, leading a powerful horse, a great-headed creature which no sooner came near the gray mare than it began to lash out. Zuleikha backed away with a snort, tossing her head, and Geraldi had to run after her and quiet her, speaking rapidly in Arabic.

He came again, leading her back, only to receive a shaft of white light in his face. He sidestepped from that light. It flickered after and found him again. Then it snapped out.

"Go easy! Go easy!" Renney was snarling in a complaining voice.

"I like to look at the gent that I'm gunna do business with," said Chalmers in explanation. "It rests me a lot to know the face of him that's gunna fight alongside of me."

Geraldi said nothing. But he was on edge with nervousness.

"Go through the gate, there," said Renney. "Go into the garden, kid, and make a round of the house and see if the watchman is hanging around. Green said that he'd fix that."

There was nothing for it but to obey.

Geraldi passed obediently through the gate, but having done so, he raised himself noiselessly into the lower fork of an apple tree. In this manner his head was brought above the top of the board fence and hedge which outlined the rear of the governor's ground. Incidentally, he could hear the conversation of the two in the alley. He was enormously relieved to find that they were not talking about him, but about the work which lay before them.

So, feeling safer, he lowered himself to the ground once more, and then proceeded through the garden as he had been directed. He had secured some description of the place from Robert Asprey earlier in the day, but by night all was altered. He had to feel his way forward until he became sure of the paths, often stopping to squint close along the ground, to take the greatest advantage of the night light.

He worked to the rear of the house. Through the kitchen window he saw the cook cleaning pans at her sink. Then he circled to the side and paused in an arbor from which he could see the front of the house. He scratched a match and covertly shading the flame he glanced at his watch and saw that it was close to half-past nine.

He had barely dropped the match when a big shadow loomed through the darkness and turned straight in from the sidewalk toward the house.

It was Robert Asprey. It made Geraldi smile a little to think how characteristic this bold approach was, in spite of the danger that might be lurking for him, and of which he had been forewarned. So he slipped through the shadows and called in a whisper. Asprey stopped and whirled with the gleam of steel in his hand.

"It's I!" said Geraldi, and came close.

Asprey chuckled.

"I thought you might be one of them," he said, even his softened voice having a distinctly thunderous rumble.

"Do you expect any warning from them?" asked Geraldi.

"Even a snake rattles before it strikes," said Asprey.

"Not snakes of this breed," answered Geraldi. "But they're behind the house. They don't expect you this early. Maybe the governor doesn't, either. Can you get in?"

"I'll ring."

"We'll see, then."

Asprey mounted the front steps, with Geraldi behind him. In answer to the ring, a servant appeared who took Asprey's name and then shook his head.

The governor, he said, had given orders that he was unable to see Mr. Asprey that night. He had left a message that he had changed his mind about the matter between them.

The door closed. Asprey turned with a faint groan.

"They've done my business for me," he said sadly. "I can't even have a chance to talk for myself!"

"Are you going to let it go at this?" asked Geraldi.

"What can I do?"

"Break into the house and force yourself on Fuller."

"I know Tom Fuller. You can't frighten him."

"You don't want to. You only want to talk with him."

"I'll try a window, then."

"Try this door, you'd better. Wait a moment."

Only a moment Geraldi leaned before it. Then it gave way, with a muffled click of the turned lock, and Geraldi pushed the door wide.

"Go on into his library," murmured Geraldi. "I think that you'll be likely to find him there. He's a book lover, people say. Go in there and talk for your life, man!"

Asprey dropped a great hand on the shoulder of his friend.

"You've showed me the way in," said he. "Heaven help me, if I can't talk myself into that pardon now!"

So he passed in, and pressed the door softly shut behind him. Geraldi descended to the ground like a shadow and skirted back around the house.

He was close to the rear gate when he saw the two companions coming in toward him.

"How's everything, kid?" asked the voice of Chalmers.

"All well," said Geraldi.

"Well?" grunted Renney. "You've kept us here long enough!"

His manner and tone had altered suddenly.

"Go on ahead," said Chalmers. "Walk on, kid. We'll come behind."

"Just a moment," said Geraldi. "I have a loose spur—it's jingling and I have to tighten it."

He dropped on one knee to the ground, but though he seemed to be fumbling at the spur, his eye was constantly peering up at the others. Suddenly Chalmers snarled: "You sneaking traitor——" and his hand made a convulsive movement.

CHAPTER XXXV.

ALL WRONG.

SO complete was Chalmers' advantage of position that he should have been able to drive his bullet straight down between the shoulders of the kneeling Geraldi, but the first word had not left his lips before Geraldi drew. It was a flashing movement into his open coat and out again, and he fired with the outward snap of his hand.

Big Chalmers staggered back. The gesture which had drawn his gun merely cast it far away and his outflung hand crashed into Renney just as the latter was firing his own weapon. Then, as the gun of Geraldi flashed again, Renney and Chalmers dropped in a heap.

The killer leaped to them and stooped over them.

Chalmers was shot through the head. And there was a broad, wet stain on the forehead of Renney.

"Both!" murmured Geraldi.

He stood up and looked quietly around him. The rear door of the house opened with a slam and a shaft of feeble, yellow light poured forth. Down the steps ran two menservants and hurried toward the place, but Geraldi slipped back among the trees.

He paused by the gate to look back and he saw the servants reach the two fallen men. Their outcry resounded blocks away, and Geraldi hurried on into the alley behind the grounds.

At his first whistle, the mare came to him. He mounted and rode down to the mouth of the alley, but there he waited for a moment, slipping two fresh

charges into the revolver he had used, and wondering what would come of big Robert Asprey. Whatever caution should have urged him to do, there was little doubt as to what he would try—and that was to break from the house and, like a good soldier, run straight for the sound of firing.

So Geraldi waited, turning the affair slowly in his mind. No doubt Chalmers had recognized his voice, and when he was alone with Renney they had planned between them the action that followed. It hardly seemed possible that, in an instant, by a gesture, as it were, they had made the final exit.

In the meantime, noise was rising in a louder and louder wave from the grounds of the governor's house. He looked back, and at that instant, half a dozen men swarmed up from the shadows and stood about him, every man armed.

"Who are you?" they asked.

Another said: "I'll do the talking."

"Very well, captain."

"Who are you? What do you sit on a horse here for?"

"You ask the governor," said Geraldi calmly. "He'll tell you why I'm here. And take your hand from the reins of my horse or I'll drill you!"

'Why, you fool," said the officer, "we're six against you."

"I don't care if you're a thousand," said Geraldi. "I have the governor's orders behind me."

This bluff seemed to have some weight with them.

"Go back down the alley, Smith and Wilson—hold on, I'll go with you. The rest of you watch this fellow. He's a suspicious character, I take it. We'll find out if the governor really has posted a man here."

The three hurried off, but three remained, grouping themselves closely about Geraldi.

"Who are you, bucko?" asked one of the curious.

"A working man," answered Geraldi. "Who are you?"

"A loafer," chuckled the other. "Has the old man put you out here?"

"He has."

"What for?"

"I don't see that you rate an answer to that."

"Keep it to yourself, then. They're raising a row, back there. Now they're through with it, though!"

In the garden, silence suddenly followed the clamor. So clear was the silence that they could hear a single man's voice speaking.

"That's Governor Fuller now," murmured one of the six. "What's happened, I wonder?"

A wild shout burst from the distance. There was a clamor. Two shots followed, one on the heels of the other. Then a scattering fusillade like thunder.

Then, loud and high from the heart of the alley: "Stop him, boys! Jenkinson — Spinder — Marks — stop that rider that's coming!"

The crash of hoofs beat up deep echoes down the lane. They smashed loudly over gravel; they passed on, thudding more softly through thick dust and the three soldiers instantly turned their attention from Geraldi.

He made no movement to escape, however, but swinging low in the saddle, so that his eye would be beneath the line of the hedges and fences on either side, he strained his eyes and made out a big man, very bulky across the shoulders, plunging down the alleyway, but sitting bolt upright in the saddle in spite of the danger into which he was riding.

There was a continual shouting from the rear, but no guns were fired at the fugitive, perhaps for the fear of striking some of the three who were guarding the mouth of the alley. And, in fact, they seemed to be a sure enough net to capture the solitary horseman.

One of them had dropped on his

knee to take aim. The other two each had a rifle at the shoulder when Geraldi made up his mind that it was time for him to act. Something in the erect position of that rider had made him remember Robert Asprey and he was willing to take his chance that it was Asprey in fact.

A word was enough for the Arab mare. Now he gave her both a shout and the spur and she leaped straight ahead into the group of the militia.

Perhaps in the old days she had been taught similar tricks by her owner. At any rate, she made nothing of charging down the trio and left them rolling helplessly in the dust while Geraldi swung her about again and rated her alongside the fugitive. It was Robert Asprey indeed, and he gave Geraldi a ringing cry of "Well done, lad!" as they shot away side by side into the dusk.

They spoke no more, merely laying their horses straight and true for the edge of town, and then rounding onto the long boulevard beside the lake.

Here, since there was no immediate pursuit, they drew back to a milder pace. They could talk at last.

"Nothing gained—everything lost," said Asprey briefly. "Some one has convinced the governor that I'm a cowardly murderer and that Sam Lapaz was a fine man and a good father of a family."

"He refused you?"

"He stood up and gave me a lecture. He said that he'd be glad to see me in prison waiting for the extreme penalty. Those were his words. He was white, he was so angry."

"What did you say back? Couldn't you find an argument?"

"Try to argue with a man who says that you ought to be hung!"

"I *would* have tried," declared Geraldi.

"I had no time. The guns began to roar in the garden, and he insisted on going out when he heard that there were two dead men."

He paused. Then he added: "You did that, of course?"

"I did that," said Geraldi. "Chalmers spotted me. They tried to murder me when my head was turned. It's hard for me to imagine, even, that the two of them have gone out."

"Wait a minute before you go ahead pitying them. We went out, the governor and I together. We reached the spot where the two were laid out, side by side. A lantern had been brought. It was flashed in their faces. I knew Renney and, of course, I knew Chalmers with the hole through his head. I thought that Renney was gone, too. But then he got to his knees——"

"What?"

"He got to his knees and staggered about for a moment. The governor himself caught his shoulder and pointed to Chalmers.

" 'Have you committed that murder?' said the governor.

" 'I?' says Renney, getting his wits back. 'I? It was Geraldi! It was Geraldi who murdered him—the pickpocket, crook, and thug!'

" 'Who is this Geraldi? Where can he be found?' says the governor. 'This is an example of the sort of work that you want me to pardon in your own case, but by Heaven, I'll deal an even-handed justice in this State. Who knows the man Geraldi?'

"Then Renney gave a gasp and a yell.

" 'He knows him!' he shouts. And he pointed at me.

" 'You know him?' says the governor. 'What have you to do with this, Asprey?'

" 'He's behind it!' yells that cur of a Renney. 'He's hired the man who murdered Chalmers from behind and tried to get me, too!'

" 'Gentlemen,' said I, 'will you notice that that bullet was fired from the front of Chalmers?'

"They wouldn't pay any attention to that. The governor was very angry.

"'You've taken advantage of my kindness to plant death traps around my house, Asprey,' he told me. 'And you're going to suffer for this. I gave you immunity from the old crime for this one night, but that immunity doesn't spread to such things as this. Men, secure this fellow and keep him closely guarded!'

"A couple of his servants started for me. What was I to do? Well, I knocked their heads together and started for the alley. I remembered you'd said that your horses would be back there. I got through the gate with bullets flying after me, the governor shouting orders, and Renney yelling like a wild cat, he was in such a fury.

"Luckily, I managed to find a horse the instant that I got into the dark alley, and as I rode down this way, you know how they yelled behind me.

"But there you came in, Geraldi, and that's the reason why we're riding along beside this lake and wondering what we can do next. But there's little left for me to do, and for you, there's only one thing."

"And that?"

"Get out of this country as quickly as possible or they'll catch you and hang you to a tree."

"They've hunted you for five years," said Geraldi.

"That's true."

"And you, old fellow, didn't have Zuleikha!"

The mare lifted her beautiful head in recognition, when she heard her name.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

LIKE A FRIGHTENED CHILD.

COUSIN EDGAR felt that it was time to take the definite act.

He had several reasons.

The first was that he had received the telegram, "Arranged," and by that he knew that the governor had been persuaded to refuse the pardon to Robert Asprey.

The second was that he needed much money to pay off his various obligations, and above all that handsome lump sum of fifty thousand dollars for which he had bargained. It never occurred even to the slippery soul of Cousin Edgar to refuse to pay that debt. It was, he felt, a matter of honor!

And, once married to Cousin Olivetta, five minutes after the ceremony he would be able to sign the checks with his own fair hand!

This was such a convincing argument with Cousin Edgar that at once he prepared to move ahead, and he went to his cousin's wife. She blushed with pleasure at the sight of him, and he took both her hands and printed a brotherly kiss upon her brow.

"My dear Olivetta, we must make a decision."

She trembled with excitement.

"We have waited long enough. Today I am going to call in the preacher."

"Good heavens!" exclaimed she.

"Doctor Cornish will be the man, I think," said Cousin Edgar.

"Louise will be furious. She'll never let us!" objected poor Mrs. Asprey.

"Ah, child," he answered, "you are speaking to one who knows no master, except his helpless love for you, my dear!"

Mrs. Asprey sat down with a thud in the nearest chair.

"What will people say?" she murmured.

"Do we care?"

"I'm not a marriageable age, Edgar!"

"I don't think," said he, "that people will gossip long about my wife."

Mrs. Asprey caught her breath.

"They wouldn't dare to say a word, Edgar, would they?"

"They certainly would not. I'll send for Doctor Cornish——"

"I must tell Louise, first."

"We'll tell her afterwards. When we walk in, man and wife, she will see that talking is useless. Louise is stubborn, but she has sense."

The directness of these suggestions carried Mrs. Asprey lightly before them like a cork before a flood.

"But," she went on, "I've always felt that a wedding that isn't in a church wasn't——"

"And white veils, my dear?"

"Well, Edgar——"

"You see, that sort of thing might get even us talked about. But a quiet marriage at home—that's different. I'll walk down the street and get Cornish. He's a good fellow and will do very well."

Cousin Edgar walked from the house.

In the meantime, Mrs. Asprey set about dressing. At least she felt that she must appear in her best for the wedding, and she had in mind a certain pink dress of taffeta, too rich for ordinary occasions.

When she looked through her closets, there was no trace of it!

Half dressed, she hurried to her daughter's room and tapped.

"Louise, Louise?"

"Yes, mother?"

"You know my pink taffeta?"

"Of course."

Louise opened the door.

"I can't find it anywhere!" said Mrs. Asprey.

"You gave it to me last year," said Louise, "because you decided that it never would do for you again. It was too small in the waist. Don't you remember?"

"Oh, heavens," said Mrs. Asprey. "Of course, I remember. I haven't a scrap of sense."

"What in the world," said Louise, "could make you want the pink taffeta on a day like this?"

She pointed toward the window, and Mrs. Asprey remembered that the taffeta had been a very warm dress indeed. It was a burning summer day. The dusty street glared like white metal.

"I really don't know," said Mrs. Asprey. "I just wanted to see if it needed patching," she finished lamely.

"Didn't you want to put it on?" asked Louise.

Under the calm, steady eye of her daughter, Mrs. Asprey turned pale.

"You're upset about something," said Louise.

"I'll go back to my room and lie down," said the mother, who only wanted to escape.

"You'd better come in here," said Louise.

When Cousin Edgar was not near, she knew perfectly well how to direct the scattered wits of her mother. Now she took her arm and escorted her deliberately into the room.

"Do you want to lie down or sit in the big chair?"

"I think I'll just sit," said Mrs. Asprey.

Her voice was shaking with fear and excitement, and in the big chair she took her place, bolt upright, her hands clasped tight in her lap.

"Poor darling mother," said the girl, a warmth of affection coming over her.

For she knew that of all kind women in the world, none was kinder than her poor mother, none had a better heart; few had more random wits!

"I have a great deal to do," said Mrs. Asprey. "I think that I'd better——"

"A great deal to do?" said Louise. "I wonder what you can have to do—on such a warm day!"

"I have to get ready——" began Mrs. Asprey, and then stopped, shocked by the confession which she had been about to make.

"For a trip, dear?" asked the girl.

Mrs. Asprey was on the point of starting from the chair and bolting for the door, in order to escape that clear, inquiring eye. She had feared her

daughter since Louise was a mere child. She literally dreaded her now.

"In a way—that is—not exactly. I really must go, Louise."

"Very well," said Louise. "I'll help you, then."

"Oh, no!" said Mrs. Asprey.

"But, dear, if you're in a hurry—you know——"

"But this is a secret, Louise."

"A secret?"

"What have I said!" murmured Mrs. Asprey.

"That there's a secret. Of course I don't want to make you tell me about it."

"Thank you, child."

Mrs. Asprey stood up.

"If it's something that I shouldn't know," persisted Louise.

Mrs. Asprey began to speak and stopped. It gave the effect of a gasp.

"I don't—I don't dare tell you, Louise!"

"Why don't you, dear?"

"Because you're so critical."

"Not a bit."

"You are, you are! Of me, always!"

"Mother dear, what's troubling you? This secret—it won't make you happy, I'm afraid."

"I knew you'd say that!" cried Mrs. Asprey.

She clasped her jeweled fingers together and gazed sadly at the girl.

"But you seem so close to tears."

"Because you frighten me so, Louise."

"But I'm only trying to take care of you, mother."

"I suppose you are," moaned Mrs. Asprey. "But I don't want you to."

"Did any one forbid you to tell me the secret?"

"Cousin Edgar would be very angry."

"I suspected that he had something to do with it," said Louise, with the chilliest of smiles.

"You never give him his due," said trembling Mrs. Asprey. "And we both agree that it's right—and you're only a child, Louise—and you don't know anything about such matters."

"What matters?" said Louise.

"Marriage," said Mrs. Asprey.

She caught a hand to her mouth. "Heavens! I've said it!" she cried.

Her daughter shrank back to the door and turned the key.

"Marriage!" she echoed.

Mrs. Asprey dropped back into the big chair from which she had risen.

"Oh, Louise, don't!" she pleaded.

"Marriage!" said the girl in a changed voice.

"Cousin Edgar says that we should," pleaded Mrs. Asprey.

"Cousin Edgar!" echoed the girl bitterly.

"Oh, Louise, you're going to be terrible to me—I know you are, and I can't stand it!"

She began to tremble violently.

"You're going to be married to Cousin Edgar. To-day! That's why you wanted the dress? Where are you to be married?"

"Here, Louise."

"In this house?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"Edgar has gone for the clergyman."

"Now?"

"Yes."

There was the sound of steps on the front porch. Then the door closed and sent its heavy jar shivering through the frame house.

"He's come—and I'm—I'm not even dressed," said Mrs. Asprey.

She started up from the chair, and like a child running in the dark, she rushed toward the door, turned the key, and dashed out and down the hall, with a little moan of relief as she left the room.

Louise had slipped to one side and now stood hesitant, uncertain whether or not she should follow.

To be concluded in the next issue of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE.

Kusko Wags His Tail

By Frank Richardson Pierce

Author of "The Sealing Kid," etc.

A BIG car, bearing the name of a motion-picture studio on its panels, rolled quietly into the driveway leading to Frank Mull's chicken ranch and came to a stop.

"I'm looking for 'Dad' Simms," the driver announced; "he's wanted at the studio immediately."

"Be with you in a second," Dad answered alertly. "Didn't think they was going to shoot to-day!" Dressed in the trappings of the West of stagecoach days, Cold Deck's oldest sour dough presently ran down the steps and climbed into the car.

At that moment Mull hurried from the feed room, where he had been cutting grass. "Just a minute, Dad," he shouted. "How about the dog? Shall I tie him up?"

Dad considered. He knew Malemute dogs, and particularly he knew Kusko, the great dog that he had rescued from a hot window where he had been used to attract attention to a store selling cheap furs. Dad had taken him to Mull's Ranch, so that the big fellow could build himself up. With the dog had come a case of salmon to help out on the feed. At first, he had been tied, then he had been given the liberty of one of the empty chicken pens. Whenever Dad left for a day he was tied up to a post. At other times he ran loose. Dad had a hunch he would be gone three days this time if the company were getting ready to shoot the big stagecoach scene.

"Naw, let him run; he needs the exercise," Dad explained; "he's got used to the place by now, and that chicken wire is plenty strong." He climbed from the car, walked over to the chicken pen, and briskly rubbed the dog's ears, grabbed him by the nose, and shook it with vigor; then with a brief, "S'long, old boy," Dad was off.

Unknown to Dad or the rancher, a terrible fear filled the Malemute's heart the moment Dad left him.

Dragged from the North country and placed in a show window, Kusko had known many cruel hours. His life had been hard indeed. His owners had regarded him as they might regard anything placed in the window to attract attention. No friendship was extended him; no affection shown him. Strangers regarded him as they regard all Northern sled dogs, as very dangerous. This reputation is not deserved. The Northern dog is just as friendly when fairly treated as other types of dog. It is only, with the exception of certain strains, when he is beaten and starved that he becomes dangerous. Then he is plenty dangerous.

The longing in Kusko's heart for affection had never been filled. Gradually, his spirit began to break. And he would, like other dogs placed in that same window, have died, but for Dad Simms' chance rescue. Dad had once owned him; Dad understood him. Therefore, Dad filled every need in Kusko's life. The instant Dad was out of sight the dog worried. Previously he had been chained, and he knew how futile it was for a dog to tug at a chain. But this day he was free except for a webbing of wire that stretched away on all sides.

And Dad was going! Perhaps never to return. Kusko grew frantic. Yet when Mull came around to look at him, the dog knew that the slightest attempt to escape would have meant the snapping of the chain. He wagged his tail lazily and Mull was deceived. The rancher, Kusko thought, was a good scout. He was a friend of Dad's, and that in itself was enough. Besides, he fed him frequently. Yes, he was a good scout. Kusko wagged his tail some more, but he did not forget Dad Simms. The moment Mull was out of sight, the dog's attitude changed. He bounded at top speed, leaped, and struck the wire. The wire gave, then hurled him back to the ground, defeated. Again he hurled himself at the wire. Again the strands gave, then sprung back into place, sending the dog down in defeat.

Frantic with worry, he ran to a post and began to dig at the wire. His big feet slipped through, and with the muscles of his powerful legs at the breaking point he pulled a strand from the staple that held it. The small opening seemed to drive him mad with eagerness. The great forelegs ripped and tore, even when the ends of the wire scratched his flesh until the blood showed on the light fur. Backing off, he plunged his head through in a mighty charge. All four legs dug into the dirt, and a strand gave way. One leg came through, then another. The rest was easy.

Mrs. Mull, washing dishes, caught a flash of the bounding creature. "The dog's gone," she cried. "There he goes, around the corner!"

Kusko turned the corner so sharply that he skidded in the mud and fell. Rolling over once, he bounded down the dirt road, following the elusive and weak scent of his beloved master. A broad ribbon of pavement intersected the dirt road. Kusko turned and raced down it. Roaring monsters that he instinctively feared rushed upon him and passed. Others overtook him, filling his delicate nostrils with the foul odor of gasoline. The rush of wind that followed each stirred his fur violently, yet such was his determination to find the man-god that all fears were submerged.

Expecting each moment that he would overtake Dad's car, Kusko ran at top speed. The scent grew fainter and fainter, then almost died. The wind carried it to the left. and the dog plunged into the stream of oncoming traffic. Brakes squeaked, cars swerved violently, and men who loved dogs exclaimed with relief, while those who hated them groaned because they had

missed him. Kusko found himself at the side of the road. The scent was gone! But he would find it again. Deep in his heart he knew he would find Dad Simms. His wanderings became aimless, yet he could not stop, for a still voice deep within insisted that he keep going, keep searching, regardless of sleep or food, until he found the man-god again. Then one stroke of the hand would be ample reward. But Kusko knew he would receive more than one stroke from Dad Simms—he always did.

Five minutes after Kusko tore his way through the chicken wire to freedom, Frank Mull had started his car and was in pursuit. The toe marks where the dog had skidded on the turn were the first of a series of clews. A block farther he found a black cat twice its normal size on the limb of a tree, staring indignantly in the distance. The cat had been returning from a night prowl and was tired when it came face to face with the Malemute. The very sight of the dog gave the cat new strength. His lean, black body seemed to take wings, so swiftly did he climb the tree. Kusko had not even paused. The next block found a flock of white leghorn chickens with necks stretched high; bills pointing toward the course the dog had taken. A mile down the highway, Mull came to a sudden stop. Two men were attempting to straighten out a fender on a car.

"Did you happen to see an Alaskan sled dog along here?" he asked them anxiously.

One of the men stopped and exclaimed: "So that was what it was, eh? I thought it was a wolf and took a second look. The next instant I'd locked horns with a truck. No, the truck wasn't hurt a bit."

Mull continued for another mile. Here he found a car in the ditch. The driver was waiting for the wrecker to come and drag him out. "Did you see a Malemute dog?" Mull inquired.

"Yeah," the other growled, "I saw him. It was either hit him or go into the ditch. Well, I mushed in the North once, and three of those dogs dragged me ten miles, and me on the sled with both feet frozen. I just had to go into the ditch. Hope you find him. He'll be killed, sure. They ain't like the city dogs—they don't savvy automobiles and trucks. Then there's poison that some people put out for dogs."

"Yes," Mull answered grimly, "I'd thought of that, too!"

For the remainder of the day Mull quartered vast areas bordering the highway. Again and again he stopped and asked questions. Again and again he chased down false tips, only to find either no dog at all or else some large mongrel that belonged to no one in particular but evidenced a willingness to belong to anybody if anybody would only have it.

It was two days later that Dad Simms returned. The stagecoach scene had been "shot." The old sour dough sensed something wrong the instant he turned into the Mull driveway. He glanced sharply at the pen where Kusko's pricked ears and bright eyes should have greeted him. The pen was empty.

Mull came in with a bucket of eggs. His work was way behind, the nests full because he had not had time to gather the eggs. "Well, Dad——" he began.

Dad nodded. "I understand. Kusko tried to find me. He's still trying!" Dad bit his lip, and tears came to his eyes. Unless a man has mushed in the North, it is difficult to understand the loyalty of the breed. That dog was searching for Dad because he loved him. Dad took a deep breath. "Ain't no need of me askin' if you've hunted.

I can see you have because your work is behind."

Mrs. Mull came out and added: "Besides hunting, Mr. Simms, we've sent word to the humane societies, dog pounds, and boy scouts in every direction for a distance of ten miles."

Dad nodded. That took in a lot of country, but ten miles wasn't far for a Malemute. "Thanks," he said.

"Dinner is ready!" said Mrs. Mull.

"Thanks, but—well—somehow I ain't hungry t'-night," Dad answered.

The stars came out. It would be a cold night, Dad predicted. "He's probably still at it," he mused; "I know 'em. He won't hunt for no warm bed until he drops; then he won't rest long. He'll keep going until he finds me."

Due to his great strength, Kusko covered considerable territory the first day. The hot sun beat upon him and somewhat slowed down his efforts, but, nevertheless, the courage in his heart was greater than the blaze of the sun. His tongue was hanging low, and the coat that protected him from the frost was now a burden. His whole system cried out for water. Again and again he sought a drink, but though every house and business establishment contained water, there was no overflow for a lost animal. Twice, late in the afternoon, he caught sight of pools near gasoline filling stations, but each was covered with a film of oil. He lapped at the vile stuff, gazed about as though some one had kicked him, then hurried on. Where? The dog did not know where he headed for. He only knew the goal he sought and the only way to reach it was to keep going.

Night came and with it a measure of coolness. The crisp air was more to his liking. He crossed numerous streets and twice was almost run down when the blinding lights of automobiles struck his eyes. Kusko at length came to a dry river bed. Water seemed near. He could smell it, yet he could not find it. In Alaska, water ran on the ground. Here it often ran underground. The dog dug down two feet, then gave it up. All he found was damp sand.

Trotting along the river bed, he presently scented other dogs and then saw lights. A half-starved dog bounded from the brush. He ran boldly alongside the Malemute, and each grew stiff with dignity. Each sniffed a moment, then Kusko trotted on, but with a wary eye on the other, for he half expected treachery. Presently another joined them. Then a third, and finally a fourth. The dogs ran in the same pack, and, though they quarreled among themselves and frequenly fought, they presented a united front in so far as strangers were concerned.

Some distance up the river bed the group decided that Kusko's eagerness to move on was prompted by fear. Without warning, the leader slashed at his side. The next instant Kusko was overwhelmed. Sheer strength brought him to his feet. One cur had caught him by the right foreleg at the lower joint, and the bones seemed on the verge of crushing. The darting slash of the wolf laid open the cur's shoulder. He quit and went howling to the nearest cover. Standing his ground, while the others got mostly wads of fur when they bit, Kusko inflicted wounds on each of his attackers in turn. Then he moved from the battleground, limping on three legs. The left foreleg was almost useless.

The efforts of the battle, plus his digging for water, had increased Kusko's thirst to madness. Yet, water was denied him. He limped along during the remainder of the night, and dawn found him near velvety lawns surrounding a wealthy man's home. Kusko moved slowly, lapping the dew

from the grass and partly quenching his thirst.

It grew warmer, and where before thirst alone had driven him almost frantic, now hunger began to gnaw. He missed the meals of cornmeal mush into which had been stirred canned salmon. But even above hunger and thirst was the longing to find Dad Simms once more. Another city with street cars, hurrying people, and swift-moving automobiles. Kusko was smart. Though of the snow country, with its space and silences, he quickly learned the dangers of crowded cities. He no longer ran wildly when a car rushed upon him, but eying it calmly, he measured the speed and course, then stepped aside.

That afternoon he bluffed a dog his own size and emptied a pan of water that had been placed there for it. He looked around for food. There was none except a small bit of bacon. He snatched it up and limped away. The joint in his foreleg was swelling. Unusual jars sent twinges of pain through it.

Toward evening, something happened. As he made his way through a back yard a rope suddenly dropped around his neck. He became a wild, plunging thing fighting for freedom against the thing that choked him. His injured paw struck the ground again and again in his struggles, but such was his fright that he did not feel the pain. Presently the rope grew slack, and a chain was snapped into the ring of his collar. "Easy, boy," a voice said, "easy now!"

A large man, holding a club in one hand for protection and the chain in the other, was eying him with interest. "Take it easy, old son," he said, "and we'll have you back. Old man Simms has offered a hundred dollars for your return, and I can use that hundred. Now, if you'll just quiet down while the missus telephones." He raised his voice. "Hey, Maudie, I got that dog! Look up the number in that ad and telephone to Simms. Say, this purp is hungry. Bring him something to eat."

Back came the woman's voice. "What'll I bring?"

"Anything. Bring some cereal!"

"Some what?"

"Some cereal." He raised his voice, as the woman did not understand. "What's the matter? Can't you hear me? Bring some mush!"

And then it happened! It was the one word Kusko had thus far understood. "Mush!" Thousands of times he had heard that ringing command that started him in motion. When a sled dog mushes he doesn't start in a leisurely manner. He moves with a rush and all his wieght behind it. There is a purpose in this, and the purpose is to break the sled runners from the snow to which they have frozen during the stop. Unless prepared for it, no man can hold a Malemute in that first rush. And this rancher knew nothing of the Northern dog. Unfortunately for him, the chain was wrapped around his hand. Hardly were the words out of his mouth when a powerful force had jerked him flat on his face and left him with a chain-bruised hand.

He got to his feet and examined his hand, then he looked at the vanishing Kusko. "Well," he growled, "there goes a hundred dollars' reward and a seventy-five-cent dog chain."

That night Kusko again beat off three curs, hampered though he was by the injured foot and dragging chain. Utterly exhausted, the dog rested from one in the morning until dawn. His ribs were beginning to show even through his heavy coat, and the water problem was again acute. He dug out a shallow spot in a thicket, turned around several times, then lay down with his nose pointed to the gentle breeze. He could not tell—the breeze

might bring the beloved scent of the man-god.

Another blistering day in a world of hot pavement, unfriendly dogs, and careless people. Once, in darting across a street, a car ran over the trailing chain. The wheel was actually on the end for a split second, but that was enough to nearly jerk the Malemute's head off and to measure him out flat. He limped away, running low, like a wolf.

Night brought a new district, and a man who looked swiftly about, then called to the dog in a low, friendly tone. Ordinarily, Kusko would not have stopped. But the crinkle of a paper in the man's hand and the scent of fresh meat was compelling. Every nerve in his body cried out for a taste of that meat so that his strength might be renewed and his quest carried on. He turned and looked at the man. The latter approached within fifteen feet, then tossed him a chunk of hamburger. The dog caught it in mid-air, then gulped it down. Two more pieces came, and the meat was gone. The man smiled and turned back. The dog went his way.

For some time Kusko continued his quest. Then he grew suddenly thirsty. He trotted along for some distance, then a strange sensation stole through his system. His hind legs grew dead and without feeling. He managed to walk on them for a half mile, then all life seemed to vanish; his hind quarters swayed, and he fell. The dog could not understand. His brain urged him to go ahead, and yet his muscles refused to respond. Curiously enough, his forelegs were not affected. His good leg went to the ground, and he pulled. Slowly he dragged his body ahead. Then he tried the injured leg. Red-hot needles prodded the joint, but the muscle strength was there. He found he could use that leg, too. After nearly five minutes, the injured leg did not pain him as much. He moved slowly ahead, dragging his quarters behind him.

Kusko knew where he was going now. Not for Dad Simms, but to the only friends he knew. The dog did not consciously direct himself. He did not reason that he must turn here, cross a road there, and take a short cut just beyond. Something, he knew not what, guided him—that something man calls instinct.

Hours of agonizing progress through the still night, then he collapsed. No longer could he drive his exhausted body ahead. Kusko had given his all in his great quest. He could give no more!

He knew, without knowing how he knew, that the goal was not far. Slowly he lifted his muzzle skyward and poured forth his soul.

The Malemute howl! It is thrilling and blood-chilling in one. It is different from the ordinary dog's howl. It harkens back to moonlit nights when men lived in caves, and wolves traveled in great packs. It sent now the chill of its note to sleeping domestic animals. Chickens stirred on their roosts; cats slunk to cover; other dogs took up the cry. The night became hideous with their clamor. Men aroused from their sleep, reached for switches and turned on the high lights that guard chicken ranches from thieves. A flock of geese opposite the Mull Ranch sent up a throaty clatter.

Dad Simms hit the floor with a single bound and was dressing before he was fully awake. Mull heard him and began to dress.

"It's Kusko!" Dad shouted. "I heard him howl in my sleep, but I'm dead sure. Listen!" Cold chills raced around Dad's ribs. "There it goes again!"

Half dressed, Dad ran into the night. Along the roads he trotted, swinging

into the same pace he used in following a dog team. Finally he stopped. "It's about here," he said.

"Just about here," Mull agreed.

Dad took a deep breath. "Kusko!" he cried. "Here, boy!"

Silence. Dad moved ahead two hundred yards. "Kusko!" Then he listened. "Hear anything?" he said to Mull.

"Yes. A kind of a whine—there he is!"

Dad was off like a shot. "Kusko! You old son of a gun! You sure caused us a lot of trouble. Dang it, but I'm glad to see you! Come here and get your ears rubbed. Nobody's going to hurt you. Why, Kusko——" Then Dad understood. His lips twisted into a snarl, and he groaned. "They've poisoned him!" Tears came down his old cheeks as he swore. Nothing he could think of in the English, Spanish, or Indian dialects was low enough to describe the dog poisoner.

Mull ran back for his car. Five minutes later they lifted Kusko gently into the car and drove back to the ranch. Dad did what he could, and through the night a doctor raced from a Los Angeles dog hospital. And while he was waiting for the doctor, Dad rubbed Kusko behind the ears, and the dog looked up. Nothing mattered now. No pain was too great to endure; no suffering too intense as long as the man-god was near. Deathless love filled the Malemute's eyes, and not once did he take them from the old man. Only once did Dad speak other than soft words. That was when Kusko tried to wag his tail and failed. Then Dad swore again.

After the doctor had arrived, Dad did two things. The previous evening a boy scout had reported that he had seen a man feeding a dog answering Kusko's description. Dad got the boy out of bed and brought him down to the ranch. "Is that the dog, son?"

"Yes, that's the dog!"

"Would you know the man if you saw him—the man who fed him?"

"Sure. We've been watching him for some time. A lot of dogs have been found dead and——"

"Take me to him, son," Dad said. And he pocketed his old .44. "No, I ain't going to kill him. Killin' is too good. I've got suthin' else in mind."

When they reached a darkened house, the boy pointed. "He lives in there!"

"Thanks! Here's fifty dollars for your boy scout troop. You're helping some, son. If what I've in mind works, your troop will get another fifty. Now run on, so you won't have to witness anything. I may go to jail for this, but I don't give a dang."

Dad rang the doorbell, and after a delay of several minutes a man appeared. He seemed to be indignant at being disturbed. "What do you want?" he demanded.

"You!" Dad answered. He studied the cold face with interest, and silently nodded his head. "Yes, you! You poisoned my dog. My dog that has saved human lives more than once! You poisoned him. Get your clothes on."

"Have you a warrant for this intrusion?"

"Yeah! Here it is!" Dad displayed the old .44, then shoved it into the man's ribs. "It's a warrant signed by old man Colt himself."

"Kidnaping——"

"Shut up!"

Dad forced the man into the car and kept the gun in his ribs while Mull drove back to the ranch.

The doctor was still there. "It's doubtful if he'll pull through. If I knew exactly what he'd been given we——"

"What'd you give him?" Dad snarled. "Speak out, or I'll kill you, and I ain't so sure men would call it

murder. Out with it!" Dad jammed the muzzle so hard into his prisoner's side that the ribs were actually wedged apart. "Out with it!"

"You'd better speak," the doctor suggested, "because if this dog dies, I don't know what Mr. Simms will do to you. I can assure you I'll not call the authorities to your aid."

Words came sullenly from the cowed man.

"And now," said Dad, "set down on that box and don't take your eyes off him. See the love in his eyes when he looks at me. See the wondering look when he feels the pain. Remember he's saved lives. Watch him, you hound! Watch him suffer! Don't take your eyes off your work. See what you've done! And you're going to stay here until he dies or—or—can wag his tail!"

It was three hours before the man broke. It came suddenly, for he had looked into the soul of a dog for one moment, then he saw the light fade as inward torture drove it from Kusko's eyes. "I never thought it was like that," he muttered. "I—I supposed they just died. I—I hate dogs. I didn't——"

"Keep your eyes on him." Dad snarled.

And from that moment it became torture to the miserable prisoner. With each spasm of the dog's pain, perspiration poured from his face, and when he would avert his eyes, the grim old man with the gun forced him to watch.

And yet, unpleasant though the sight was, Kusko's suffering was not conscious. The doctor had seen to that and had told Dad so, but Dad did not tell his prisoner.

Some time around noon Kusko appeared to die. A great peace stole over his worn body. The muscles relaxed. Mrs. Mull brought food, but Dad shook his head. "We don't want to eat! Thanks!" Then furiously he turned on the prisoner. "Keep your eyes on him!" he cried. A shudder ran through the dog, and Dad forgot to watch his man for the moment "Kusko," he whispered. "Kusko, old boy!"

Trooping before Dad's old eyes came pictures of the trail. The ice-locked river, with Kusko leading a team of spirited dogs. An exhausted team kept going by the undying spirit of the leader, and Dad himself lying on the sled half frozen and helpless from going through an overflow. Packing over dangerous glaciers, with Kusko, bearing his forty pounds, at his heels. He closed his eyes. Then he opened them again. "Kusko!" he said softly.

The Malemute's eyes opened slowly. Their depths were clear and filled with deathless love for the man-god. The muscles in his tail grew tense, and its white tip bobbed briefly. Dad's chest lifted in a mighty sigh. He looked from the dog to the prisoner.

The man's face was drawn. In a few hours he had changed. He had suffered more, perhaps, than the dog. "Thanks," he muttered, then again "Thanks!" He half extended his hand, then withdrew it.

From the kitchen came Mrs. Mull's voice. "Want something to eat, Mr. Simms?"

"Yes," said Dad. He started to go. But Kusko's eyes held him. The Malemute struggled to follow. "Yes," said Dad, "but I'll eat it here with my boy friend."

Fenced Country

By Harley P. Lathrop

Author of "'Dobe Dollars," etc.

AS "Rod" Ames was about fed up with open country, the sight of a massive, well-guyed post, marking the corner of the first fenced-in tract he had encountered since the day before, was a welcome one, as he came jogging down the trail to Donna Anna.

Presently, topping a swell on the prairie, he discerned a little group of buildings a mile, perhaps, ahead. In the foreground, shaded by a half dozen scraggly cottonwoods, stood a weather-beaten old ranch house. Behind this ran a long, low structure, half barn, half shed, which, in turn, was backed up by a series of pole corrals.

Rod cocked an eye at the sun. "I wouldn't wonder if they'd just about be havin' dinner now," he reflected, and dug gently with one spur to quicken his pony's lagging pace. The pony broke into a lope and by the time half the intervening distance was covered Rod began to note signs of strange activity centering about the ranch house.

As he drew near he saw that the pole corrals were full of bawling cattle, while underneath the shed lazed half a dozen saddled horses. In the ranch-house yard stood a wagon loaded full of battered household chattels, and near by burned a small fire over which hovered a figure busy with pots and pans.

When, after turning into the yard, he rode past the wagon, Rod observed a cook stove prominent among the other household goods. This explained the reason for the open fire.

He swung to the ground and while he was tying his horse a little knot of men left the vicinity of the corrals, heading toward the house. All save one stopped near the fire, but this one continued to advance in Rod's direction. He was an unattractive man, coarse-featured, with close-set, calculating eyes and thin, tight-clamped lips that bespoke a penurious nature.

"My name's Anse Hutton and I'm runnin' this outfit," the man said to Rod, his tone obviously lacking in welcome. "Yo' figure on havin' dinner with us?"

"I was, but I ain't now," Rod answered briefly, and turned in the direction of his horse. He was not beholden to this surly ranchman, therefore he felt

perfectly at liberty to repay churlishness in kind.

"Wait a minute!" Hutton had ironed some of the chill unfriendliness from his voice. "Would yo' be willin' to do a return favor and drive thet wagon down the road a piece ef I give yo' yore dinner?" he asked.

Notwithstanding that Rod had eaten last the night before and consequently was as hungry as the proverbial wolf, refusal trembled on the tip of his tongue. But before he could get out the words, the overalled figure at the fire called: "Come and get it!"

The voice was a low contralto and Rod, glancing in the direction of the fire, discovered with some surprise that the cook was a girl. She had now turned in his direction and he could not help but note the pronounced dissimilarity between this girl and the man whom he judged to be her father.

Her features were as delicate as Anse Hutton's were coarse, her hair was fine and the color of sun-ripened corn, while his was black and stringy. The color of her eyes reminded Rod of the violet of a pansy, and her mannish garb did little to hide the slenderness of her form. Her age might have been eighteen, not more at any rate.

For the space it might take one to light a cigarette, Rod's eyes lingered on the girl. In so short a time as that the realization came to him that all desire for an abrupt departure had vanished and that, despite the owner's surliness, he would like to work for this outfit, or if that was not feasible, at least to stay in this section.

"I'll take yo' up," he said, turning again to Anse Hutton.

He followed the other to the tailboard of the wagon and, selecting a cup and plate, helped himself liberally from the pot and skillet beside the fire. The remainder of the crew were by this time eating and Rod noted that all save one were Mexicans or their half-breed kin. This sole exception was a grizzled old fellow whose youth was far behind him and whose glory as a cowboy was on the wane.

One finds such men quite often, battered, old prairie relics whom Dame Fortune has passed by and who, unfavored because of age for steady jobs, are forced to eke out a precarious living working here and there wherever extra hands are needed.

Rod seated himself beside this oldtimer. He said his name was Andy and followed this by a sotto-voce observation that he'd never yet seen Anse Hutton put out something for nothing.

At the conclusion of the meal, Anse Hutton directed two of the crew to bring out the wagon team, meantime dousing the fire with his own hands and assisting the girl to gather up and place the unwashed wishes in an empty box.

The team, which was already harnessed and standing beneath the shed, proved to be a pair of young mules half broken and full to the brim with a mule's inherent wickedness.

"Yo' think yo' kin handle 'em?" Anse Hutton asked of Rod, eying the obstreperous pair dubiously as the two hands fought to hook them to the wagon.

"I reckon," assented Rod. "They'll run a piece, of course, but I'll unsaddle my pony and tie him to the off mule's bridle. That'll serve to hold 'em down a bit."

"All right, then," agreed Anse. "Where yore headed for is the first house twixt here and Donna Anna. It's about ten miles. We'll be followin' on behind with the herd so ef you drop to pieces befo' getting there, we'll pick yo' up."

Securing the lines, Rod clambered onto the seat and nodded for the two hands who were clinging to the mules' bridles to turn loose. Anse, however, signaled them to wait and beckoned the girl forward.

"Climb aboard, sis," he directed.

The command came as an outright surprise to Rod, for the thought of a passenger had never entered his mind. His heartbeats quickened and he glanced at the girl from the tail of his eye, fully expecting to hear her demur. But instead, picking an opportunity when the plunging team were for a moment quiet, she climbed quickly over the wheel and seated herself by Rod's side.

It was fifteen minutes later and the ranch was a full two miles behind before Rod felt safe to talk.

"Them mules sure aimed to do a lot of misbehavin' at first, but I reckon by now they've changed their minds," he remarked easily.

The girl, who had been clinging with all her strength to the uncushioned board seat throughout the wild ride just ended, nodded but said no word. Her breath was still coming fast and excitement had turned the purple of her eyes to black.

A half mile farther on, with the team at a slow trot, Rod made another attempt to engage her in conversation.

"Seein' as we have never been introduced, I best tell yo' my name," he said. "It's Joe, Joe Ames. But most every one calls me Rod."

She smiled mischievously and her answer made patent the fact that she had been making some little observation on her own account. "Do they call yo' Rod," she inquired in a throaty voice, "because yo' are so tall and straight."

"No," replied Rod seriously, failing to detect the slight shade of banter in her tone. "Once when I wasn't much more'n a kid I took a job as deputy sheriff down on the Rio Grande where I come from. Soon after I had an argument with an Eastern crook that drifted down that way. I bested him and later he remarked I was chain lightnin' with a rod. He meant a gun. So they got to callin' me Rod, and the name stuck."

"I like nicknames," the girl told him. "My name's Salvation, but my friends all call me Sallie."

"I know that. I heard yore father namin' yo' befo' we left. Sal-lie Hutton," he slowly drawled the syllables. "That's a nice name."

"But it's not Sallie Hutton. Anse Hutton's not my dad."

"Yore folks are daid?" Rod inquired softly. He saw a gathering film of moisture cloud her eyes and instantly regretted the question. But she winked the tears back and when she replied her voice was pitched in the matter-of-fact tone that comes from constant repetition.

"Yes," she said, "they were killed when I was a tiny baby. No one knew who they were or where they came from. That's why I have no other name than Salvation. It was worked on some of the baby clothes I wore."

So, the first ice of acquaintanceship thus broken, they talked as they rode along. From Sallie Rod learned that years before Anse Hutton and his wife, while pioneering in this sparsely settled country, had come on the charred remains of a prairie schooner with the two dead bodies beside it. Some band of Indians roving from their reservation had committed the atrocity and after stealing the stock and all things movable had vanished. Sallie they found sound asleep in a clump of cactus where evidently her mother had hidden her at the first indication of attack.

The Huttons had kept the baby, waiving any formality of adoption. Then a few years ago old Anse's wife had died, worn out from the constant labor her husband's penuriousness demanded, and the burden of her tasks devolved on Sallie's shoulders.

In turn Rod told Sallie of cities, San Antone, and Houston, and Fort Worth, places she had never visited.

Late in the afternoon they sighted a five-room shack a short distance back from the trail, in the open country.

"That is where we are movin'," Sallie told Rod a little later.

In spite of her half-hearted protests that there was no need for him to do it, he unloaded the wagon and set up the cookstove. In repayment, she insisted that he wait and she would prepare an early supper.

They were eating together in the rude lean-to kitchen when "Wolf" Arno, without the formality of knocking, opened the door and stalked inside.

What this man's given name may have been does not greatly matter, for by all who knew him he was called Wolf and the title fitted perfectly. His teeth were prominent and of a canine sharpness; he had a long, predatory nose, and a pair of bold eyes that kept up a ceaseless roving like the eyes of some lone, old, prairie wolf.

"Waal, I see Anse finally decided to move," he said to the girl, ignoring Rod's presence completely.

"Yes," she answered, and the inflection of her voice carried both defiance and dislike.

"He's comin' back yonder somewhere with his herd?" asked Wolf.

"He planned to turn loose somewhere near the big water hole," replied Sallie.

"Waal, I think I'll lope out that way. I want to see Anse particular," Wolf told her. He let his eyes rest on Sallie for a moment in a proprietary way, then transferred his attention to Rod. The corner of one lip drew back, exposing his teeth.

"I reckon yo' best be ridin' my way, too," he said harshly.

"Then yo' reckon wrong, unless yore goin' in the direction of Donna Anna," Rod replied. His voice was toned to an even pitch, but his eyes had suddenly grown cold. The gaze of the two men locked and during the next few seconds what had been instinctive dislike at first sight crystallized into hate on the part of Wolf and contempt on the part of the younger man.

"The' ain't no job fo' yo' in Donna Anna or thereabouts," snapped Wolf, making no pretense at concealing his feelings. "Stray cowhands, ef yo' want the truth, ain't welcome here. So yo' best make a start and keep travelin' right on through town."

It needed no great degree of acumen to perceive the motive behind Wolf's warning, for his voice was shot with jealousy. Momentarily Rod wondered if by chance any degree of affection existed betwwen the sweet-faced girl opposite him and the man beside the door. But a hasty side glimpse revealed a look of plain dislike in Sallie's eyes. Queerly enough the knowledge gave Rod a feeling of satisfaction.

"Yo-all," he drawled, "are mighty kind to warn me. But since I left my daddy's house when I was sixteen, I ain't cared to have any man supervise my comin's or goin's. Me, I've taken a sudden likin' to this country, and so I aim to linger here a while."

It was a downright challenge to Wolf to show his hand. But for some reason of his own, he chose just then to dodge the issue. "Yo' bear in mind what I told yo'," he snapped, and without further word stepped outside and clumped heavily to his waiting horse.

Dusk was coming on when Rod led his pony to the wagon where his saddle still rested and began making preparations to continue his journey.

"Did yo' mean what yo' told Wolf Arno about takin' a likin' to this country?" asked Sallie, who had accompanied him outside.

"Mebbe I lied a little," replied Rod, as he swung aboard his horse. Then he leaned forward and his voice became unusually gentle. "Mebbe I should have said I had taken a sudden likin' to the people—to one at least," he continued. "That, I expect, would've been nearer the truth."

Sallie refused to meet Rod's eye, but a telltale wave of color creeping upward

from her throat informed him that she understood. He took a long breath and grew a trifle bolder. "Would I be presumin' ef I hoped that—that a certain person didn't exactly hate me neither?" he asked softly.

The sudden light that gleamed in Sallie's eyes was entirely beyond her power to withhold. And, unfortunately for Rod, he was in no position to see it, for she was gazing up the trail. Nor was her reply in any way betraying.

"Oh, here comes old Andy now!" she exclaimed. "That means I must get busy with supper, for Anse can't be far behind. Good-by till I see yo' again."

" 'Good-by till I see yo' again,' " Rod repeated a little later as he sat beside the trail awaiting the oncoming Andy. " 'Good-by till I see yo' again.' I reckon by that she expects me to stay like I said I was goin' to." Which wasn't a wrong conclusion at all.

At length old Andy jogged up and greeted Rod with a wide smile. "I figured yo'd hev yore knees parked under a restaurant table in Donna Anna about this time," he said.

Briefly Rod explained that he had eaten here. "And yo'?" he asked.

Old Andy swore his disgust. "When he paid me off, that miser of an Anse pointedly said he wasn't furnishin' meals to any one not workin' for him steady. Course what he said wouldn't make any difference to Sallie. But I reckon I'll wait till I get in town before I eat."

Side by side the two jogged down the trail toward Donna Anna to the accompaniment of a desultory conversation. Their talk drifted here and there and presently Rod touched on a topic that had been puzzling him ever since the previous noon.

"How is it," he asked, "that Hutton is movin' his stock from behind wire to open range? Accordin' to my observation, the extra cost of handlin' cattle in an unfenced country more than equals what the lease rent amounts to on a fenced pasture. Providin', of course, a person is leasin'."

"Yore reasonin' is correct, especially in a country as breshy as this is," assented Andy. "Anse didn't want to move. The's five thousand acres in that piece, and he was leasin' it for a dime an acre. The long and short of it is he was forced off."

"Yo' mean his lease run out and somebody overbid him?" inquired Rod.

"No," replied Andy, "Anse never had no lease. He was too cautious to tie himself down, so he just paid a monthly rental. The ranch is owned by an Eastern fellow named Brown who inherited it from his uncle. As long as Anse paid a dime an acre rent, Brown was plumb satisfied. But when Anse notified him a while back he was movin' off, Brown hustled down here. Now he's hangin' around tryin' to sell the place."

Rod's interest quickened. "I don't quite get yo'," he said. "Why does Brown want to sell? Seems to me there should be plenty anxious to lease a fenced ranch."

"That's because yo' ain't acquainted with Wolf Arno," explained Andy. "Some time back he got the idea of buyin' this ranch and goin' into the cow business. So he politely told Anse to move off and then passed the word around it wouldn't be healthy under the circumstances for any one else to lease it. He had it all doped out that with the property vacant this fellow Brown would be rearin' to sell. And now that's happened he plans to get the outfit at his own price. I figure he means to let things stew a while until Brown comes down two bits or so on his askin' price, which is a dollar an acre."

With quickening dislike, Rod recalled the predatory features of Wolf Arno. "Howcome this fellow Wolf can get away with a deal like that?" he asked. "Is he bad?"

"Bad!" echoed Andy. "Why, man, he's pizen! Gun or fists, it makes no

matter. He'd as lief kill a man either way."

Rod rolled a cigarette deliberately, his thoughts reverting to the air of truculent proprietorship worn by Wolf when, a few hours before, he had walked unbidden into the kitchen. No doubt, he reflected, Wolf had some hold over Anse Hutton. He wondered if by any chance this might include Sallie, and the bare idea made a little tingling sensation creep down his spine. But he asked no further questions and at length the pair rode into Donna Anna.

In all essentials Donna Anna was a replica of hundreds of other prairie cow towns. The business houses were single-storied structures, each one boasting an imposing second-story false front. These extended along two blocks of the main street. Backing up the business section, a double score of weather-beaten residences were scattered about in haphazard arrangement. A drab, uninteresting place it was, but nevertheless born of necessity for a trading point.

Although it was long after dark, the business houses were still open, but the saloons seemed to be the center of activity.

"Yo' best figure on stayin' with me while yo're here," Andy said to Rod. "I got a little place the other side of town and, while it ain't much, it's better'n what passes for a hotel."

Rod assented and accompanied his companion to a restaurant while he ate a belated supper.

When they were again outside old Andy grinned. "How about a little snifter before turnin' in?" he suggested amiably.

"A good idea," assented Rod, and led the way down the street to the first pair of swinging doors. The place they entered was not particularly inviting and business seemed extremely quiet. One man was drinking alone at the bar, while two others were playing at a roulette wheel which occupied one corner of the room.

Rod bought drinks, paying for them with a bill he extracted from a bulging wallet. At sight of the well-lined pocketbook the bartender flashed a surreptitious signal to the gamekeeper across the room, and began at once to talk to Andy, pointedly excluding Rod from the conversation.

So presently Rod's attention, with nothing better to distract it, was caught by a heated argument taking place at the roulette table. One of the players was vociferously contending that he had been underpaid in his winnings to the extent of five dollars. The gamekeeper appeared equally indignant.

"Why, man, yo're crazy! I never short-changed any one in my life, and yo' know it," he protested virtuously. Nevertheless, the argument waxed hotter and Rod's eyes, roving in that direction, chanced to light on a bill lying underneath the table. Making sure by a second glance that his eyes were not deceiving him, he left the bar and started across the room.

From the tail of his eyes the gamekeeper observed Rod's move and mumbled. "Yo'-all clear out!" The contentious player and his companion hastily obeyed. By the time Rod gained the table the gamekeeper was alone.

Rod bent over and retrieved the bill lying beneath the table. "Here's that five," he said, laying down the money. "Likely one of you brushed it off."

The gamekeeper, however, waved the bill aside. "Findin's is keepin's in this place," he declared. "Put it in yore pocket."

But Rod demurred. "No," he said, "the money evidently belongs to that fellow who was playin' just now. So suppose I leave it with yo' to give him."

"Oh, he got his," yawned the gamekeeper. "Rather than listen to his yawp. I paid him off just before he left. Yo're in luck. Go south with it, mister."

Rod shook his head and for a space the two argued good-naturedly. Finally, the gamekeeper threw up his hands in a gesture of resignation. "Suppose we compromise and leave it to chance," he suggested. "Buck the wheel once, mister. If yo' call the turn, yo' take the bill and what yo' win besides. But if yo' lose, the money goes to the house. That's fair enough."

And so it was—apparently. However, surface indications are not always to be trusted and, furthermore, there is this to be considered: The art of decoying ready money into games of chance is as old as gaming itself, and the methods used are legion. This was but one of the countless variations. The two at the table when Rod came in were accomplices of the gamekeeper. The bartender, upon spotting Rod's well-filled wallet, had signaled the arrival of a possible sucker, and the argument and planting of the bill had been staged with the sole idea of attracting Rod's attention. Now the gamekeeper's proposal bade fair to draw the sucker into the game. And, once in, enough skillful come-on work to arouse the gambling lust would follow and then would ensue the plucking of another sucker. Simple? Yes, and invariably successful, provided the come-on lacks sophistication.

But Rod was border reared and long since had cut his eye teeth. From the very commencement of the argument between the gamekeeper and his two accomplices, he had divined what was in the wind. Curiosity, tempered by amusement, had impelled him to play his part according to rote.

So now, wondering just how much the house would allow him to win before beginning systematically to milk him of his roll, he nodded and placed the bill on the black thirteen which among the gambling fraternity is notoriously considered a house number.

"I'll play it straight," he said, suddenly, deciding to end the farce right here. He knew he would never win, for the chances are approximately thirty-eight to one against such happening, and, moreover, Rod was convinced that this game was crooked.

With a little scowl of disappointment, the gamekeeper, covering Rod's money, spun the wheel and flirted the ball in the opposite direction, then began monotonously to chant: "The little pill she rolls, she rolls."

A whirling blur of color, a sustained musical hum. Then, *black—red—black—red!* The wheel was slowing down! *Odd—even—even—odd! Thirty-four—six—twenty-seven!* The little sphere of ivory lagged and trembled on the brink of each compartment. Lines of strain showed on the gamekeeper's face, for thirteen came next. For the space it might take one to draw a breath the ball hung stationary. Then *click* it dropped into the next compartment. Thirteen had won, and the house was due to pay off thirty-five to one.

Before Rod commenced play he was as sure as mortal man could be without positive proof that the wheel was so rigged as to permit manipulation. And now the worried look on the gamekeeper's face plainly announced that something had gone wrong with the internal mechanism. This made him doubly sure that his surmise had been correct.

"Of all the luck!" he breathed silently, and instead of reaching for his winnings, obeyed a sudden hunch. "If the house wants to play that high, I'll let the bet ride as it lays," he said.

The gamekeeper came to an instant decision. Even though the wheel was out of order and consequently beyond his control, the chances bulked thirty-eight to one in favor of the bank. Moreover, he was a firm believer in the axiom that declares "lightning never strikes twice in the same place."

So, licking his dry lips, he reached into the table drawer and began stacking

roll after roll of greenbacks on the table. "The bank will see yore play," he said hoarsely.

So once more arose the musical hum of the revolving wheel and the whir of the racing ball. Slowly the sounds faded into breathless silence. Then at last came the inevitable *click* as the sphere sought its final resting place.

The gamekeeper broke into low, vicious muttering. Lightning had struck twice in the same place. Thirteen for the second successive time had won, and the bank was loser to the extent of six thousand odd dollars.

Five minutes later found Rod again in the saddle jogging out of town beside old Andy. His pockets were stuffed with greenbacks and he had not yet recovered from the daze of astonishment which enveloped him when the ball for the second time clicked into the chosen slot.

From that moment on Andy had engineered the proceedings. He insisted that Rod collect his winnings without delay and then had led the way to their horses.

At length when they had cleared the town he motioned to a small building looming dimly ahead. "My place," he said briefly. "We'll stop there."

When they were within he began busying himself about the stove. "I figured I'd make coffee and rustle yo' up a bite to eat," he explained. "Then yo'd best hit the trail and keep goin', providin' yo' value yore skin."

Rod's face mirrored his amazement at the unexpected suggestion. "Why?" he asked blankly.

"Well," Andy made slow reply, "it's the first time to my knowledge that wheel has ever been tapped for anything more'n chicken feed. And, unless I'm greatly mistaken, the man who is backin' the game will be mighty sore. My guess is that he'll make yo' trouble and plenty of it if yo' stick around this country."

By now Rod had shaken off his daze and was once more his normal self. "Who," he asked with no great show of interest, "might that man be?"

Old Andy hesitated a moment. "Wolf Arno," he finally said. "It's a cinch he won't be able to swing that ranch deal now, and he'll figure yore to blame. Yes, sir, he'll shore be gunnin' for yore scalp. You'd better look out."

For as much as a minute Rod remained silent, his eyes focused blankly on the opposite wall. Mention of the ranch had changed his trend of thought and in his fancy he was building air castles. He himself he saw as master of the abode, and the mistress was a certain young lady with a low contralto voice and hair like dancing sunlight.

At length, recalled to earth by a suggestive cough from Andy, Rod grinned and shook his head.

"I never yet been stampeded into goin' where I didn't want to and this country suits me fine," he said. "So if this man Arno feels that way, he'll have a chance to pop his whip."

Age knows only too well the futility of arguing with youth, so Andy said no more but desisted from his labors and began preparing for bed.

Nor when morning came did he refer in any way to his last night's warning. It was Rod who, after breakfast was over, broached the subject.

"Being as I aim to stay in this section," he began, "I may as well go into town and face the music. Besides, I happen to have business there."

"What's that?" old Andy asked curiously.

"Why, I aim to buy the ranch Anse just moved off of, providin' the owner is still of a mind to sell. After that, then I'll go to the bank and mortgage it for enough to buy some cattle," Rod explained. "And, Andy," he continued, "I'd like mighty well fo' yo' to come along. Yo' could witness the papers,

and besides I'll need a hand and I sorta hoped yo'd take the job."

The light that came into old Andy's eyes resembled the light in a stray dog's when by chance he receives a caress. Nor was it any wonder, for old Andy had long been an unwanted stray himself. He crossed the room and silently unearthed an ancient, rusty .45 from the depths of a battered trunk.

"I ain't never in my whole life took part in any gun play, Rod," he said in a voice that quavered slightly. "Still, the's a first time fo' everything and so if yo' and Wolf Arno tangle I'll sure try and back yore play. Let's go."

It was high noon exactly when Rod, followed by Andy, came out of the office of Donna Anna's only lawyer. Tightly buttoned beneath his jacket was the deed to the ranch he had first seen only the day before.

"We'll have dinner," he told his companion, "then go to the bank, and see what sort of arrangements we can make for cattle."

They started across the street to a restaurant when by the merest chance Rod's eye encountered a wagon and a team of mules a few doors farther on. For a fraction of a minutes his eyes rested on the girl who sat alone holding the reins, and his heartbeats quickened.

"Yo' go ahead, old-timer," he told Andy. "I'll join yo' presently.'

"I heard of yore good luck and I'm glad for you'," Sallie told Rod, as he stood beside the wagon wheel a moment later. Then her voice grew wistful. "Yo'll be leavin' town now, I expect?"

Rod shook his head. "Have yo' forgotten me sayin' that I had taken a sudden likin' to a certain person and that likin' was bound to hold me here?" he asked quietly.

The light that came into Sallie's eyes caused Rod's hopes to soar. Perhaps, after all, the air castles he had builded the night before might become real.

"Some people claim the' is no such thing as love at first sight," he softly stated. "But I know different, fo' it has come to me. Just now I bought the ranch where yo' used to live and I bought it hopin' yo' would come and share it with me. Do yo' think yo' care enough fo' that?"

Because he had never before spoken thus to a girl, Rod looked away in some embarrassment. So he failed to observe the lovelight that momentarily flashed in Sallie's eyes and the clouded look of sorrow that replaced it. Just then she was undergoing a suffering of her own. This had its inception shortly after Rod had left her the previous evening.

Rod had scarcely faded from sight when old Anse, accompanied by Wolf Arno, came riding in. Sallie had prepared supper for them both and afterward, in the presence of old Anse, Wolf had asked her to marry him.

Making no attempt to conceal the repugnance she felt toward him, Sallie had declined in no uncertain terms. Then the Wolf, living up to his nickname, had bared his fangs.

"If yo' don't," he declared coldly, "I'll see that Anse here goes to jail. For I happen to know he has been brandin' other people's calves. Not many, but enough to jug him."

A glance at Anse sufficed to reveal Wolf told the truth.

"So," continued Wolf in a harsh voice, "it's strictly up to yo' to make yore choice. Yo' can repay Anse fo' yore bringin' up by marryin' me, or yo' can see him go to jail."

While Sallie told the truth when she said she had no surname or knowledge of her parents, there can be no question but what she came of a stock in which loyalty is a paramount virtue.

For a moment she considered, her eyes straying from Anse to Wolf, then back again to Anse. He was an abject figure in his fear, but to his credit be it said that he made no move to influence her decision.

Then in the end blood told. By a a great effort of will, she banished from her mind's eye the picture of the young man who just that afternoon had come into her life and turned to Wolf.

"I'll marry yo'," she said in a lifeless voice, "some time within the year."

All this Sallie was reacting in her mind while Rod stood waiting for her answer. When at last she could no longer put off replying, her voice was thin and shot with agony.

"Please go away, for I am promised to another," she said tonelessly. "Please go away."

" 'Please go away fo' I am promised to another,' " Rod repeated through dry lips a moment later as he stumbled across the street. " 'Please go away!' " Oblivious to everything, he was like a man walking in darkness. So he failed to observe Andy, who was approaching at a run. The old puncher took Rod by the arm and forcibly hustled him to the sidewalk.

"Yo' best get under cover," he panted, "fo' Wolf Arno's just yonder down the street full of bad likker and tellin' the world he's gunnin' fo' yore scalp."

The very imminence of danger served as could nothing else to jar Rod back to normal. He shook off Andy's arm and gazed about. Queerly enough, the street was empty of people. Even the mule team and wagon across the way had disappeared. Only one figure was visible, and that was the gaunt form of Wolf Arno, walking catlike up the street, his pistol held in readiness .

Rod's eyes narrowed to mere slits. "Get fo' cover, yo'," he snapped at old Andy. "This is strictly my quarrel." Then he took the middle of the street and, without drawing his gun, began walking slowly in the direction of the approaching Wolf.

Picture a sun-drenched thoroughfare, ankle-deep in dust, bounded on either side by drab, weather-beaten buildings, with windows devoid of staring faces, and doorways empty. Imagine a stark, empty silence like the silence which hangs over a deserted village. For the word had been quickly spread that tragedy was imminent, that one man was about to pit his life against that of another. True to its code, the West had left the field clear for personal settlement.

Rod continued his onward walk, his eyes vigilantly watching for Wolf's initial move. Then when he caught the first upward flick of the other's gun he sprang sidewise, weaving his body from side to side, while his own right hand flashed downward. A second passed, not more, and two spurts of orange flame pierced the bright sunlight. As if giving to the pressure of a sudden, swift breeze, Rod's hat lifted slightly, then settled back in place. Wolf Arno tottered and slumped forward into the dust of the street.

Like bees hurrying from a hive, people came rushing from the saloons and business houses. Shoulder to shoulder with Rod stood old Andy.

"Yo' seen it! Yo' seen it!" he yelped excitedly, darting toward a man wearing a bright star on his lapel who was approaching the lifeless Wolf. "It's a clear case of self-defense, a dozen folks'll swear to it. Wolf done shot first!"

The officer nodded. "I don't see a thing to arrest this young man for, if that's what yo' are drivin' at," he said dryly.

Andy turned, congratulations on his lips, but Rod had vanished in the gathering crowd. Thirty minutes later saw him, the picture of dejection, jogging along, a mile out of town. His air castle had proved just that. Small difference did the deed reposing in his pocket make to him. With a certain violet-eyed girl unattainable, this country, he felt, was only fit to leave.

Presently he heard from behind the clatter of a fast approaching vehicle.

Rod did not turn. If the law had changed its mind and wanted him after all, he would find out soon enough. The team drew up abreast, forged a pace or two ahead, then the driver swung them cleverly to block the road.

"I came to tell yo' that I am free to marry now," Sallie said when Rod had halted. She did not tell him why or make any explanation. That would come in due time, she knew.

Rod's heart pounded, but his voice was even when he asked: "Is there a minister in Donna Anna, honey?"

"Yes," answered Sallie, "and old Andy has gone to hunt him for us."

A TOAD OF TEXAS

IT was hardly news of nation-wide interest when the old courthouse in Eastland, Texas, was torn down, but the opening of its corner stone caused scarcely less conversation and a lot more controversy than a transoceanic flight. For, when the stone was opened, after being sealed for thirty-one years, a live horned toad was discovered therein—not in the pink of physical condition, it is true, but still alive. It breathed, after about twenty minutes' exposure to the air, and is returning to normal, although its mouth seems to have grown together.

County Judge Edward Pritchard saw the toad removed and revived; H. A. Parks, superintendent of the company which is tearing down the courthouse, swears that the cornerstone was never tampered with, and the man who picked the concrete from the top of the stone corroborates this statement. Yet the man who should settle the question beyond dispute is unable to do so. That man is E. E. Wood, who brought a toad to the courthouse, thirty-one years ago, when the cornerstone was being laid. He had wanted the animal sealed in the stone, but objections were raised, and he walked out on the disputants, to keep an appointment with the band in which he played. He never knew what happened to the animal, and no one else remembers.

In spite of the fact that several persons of good repute witnessed the disentombment and miraculous revival of the doughty toad, which now sits enthroned in a drug-store window, such eminent scientists as Doctor Raymond L. Ditmars, curator of the Bronx Zoo, William M. Mann, director of the National Zoölogical Park at Washington, and Doctor D. W. Hamlett, assistant professor of zoölogy at Indiana University, say it just isn't so. Had the toad not died of sheer boredom, it still seems likely to them that it would have perished from lack of air.

One notable result of the whole controversy is the interest manifested by Easterners in the toad itself—they never having seen a horned toad. C. Emerson Brown, curator of the Philadelphia zoo, has been hard put to it to obtain horned toads for exhibition. After frenzied telegraphing, he at last managed to secure, for airplane delivery, two dozen of the comely creatures.

Ramblin' Westward

By Norman Burke

JUST a-lopin' along
Any old trail,
A-whistlin' a tune
Without any scale.
Only takin' my time,
As I ramble all over
The hills and the prairies,
And fields of wild clover.
I feel just as good
Any place, any time,
And I don't give a rip
For a Florida clime.
My roof is the sky,
My floor is the earth,
And my light is the stars
That twinkle in mirth.
For they seem to be laughin'
And winkin' in glee,
As I drop off to sleep
With my thoughts carefree.

Sugarfoot Shoots

By *Ben Jeris*

THE man's big body trembled with rage. His whiskered face was gray. Bitter words trickled through his tightly-drawn lips.

The object of the Hob Corl's anger stood in the doorway of the little cabin, teetering on run-down heels, grinning foolishly. The pint-sized, grinning individual was "Sugarfoot" Gaffney, Corl's partner. And he was undoubtedly drunk. Under each arm the little man held a parcel, carefully wrapped in brown paper.

"Don't get mad now, Hob," the little man protested. "Just listen to me a minute. I met a feller——"

But the mild protest fell on deaf ears. Hob Corl was mad through and through, dangerously so. All too clearly he sensed that this particular fall from grace on the part of his little partner meant the loss of some two thousand dollars, which money Gaffney had gone to the settlement at Black River to collect. Hob Corl had worked hard for that two thousand dollars, and now——

Corl sprang forward suddenly, caught the little man by the throat, and shook the slight body as a terrier would shake a rat. Gaffney was like a child in his hands.

The paper parcels fell to the ground.

"You—you——" Suitable words evaded the angry big man.

"Cut it out, Hob," Gaffney stuttered. "C-c-u-t—it—out!"

But Corl was thoroughly aroused. He half dragged, half carried Sugarfoot Gaffney to the edge of a shale bank a dozen yards from the cabin. Ten feet below, a small stream drifted lazily on toward the valley. With a well-coördinated shove and kick, Corl sent the little man sprawling over the lip of this miniature canyon. Gaffney landed on all fours in the cold water. He came to his feet coughing and sputtering, waded ashore, climbed the opposite bank, and, without once turning around, disappeared in the spruce thicket in the direction of Black River, from which he had just come.

Quick to anger, Corl as quickly forgot his sudden rages. By the time he reached the cabin his temper had cooled and he was somewhat ashamed. Sugarfoot was a little cuss. He really

shouldn't have manhandled him so. Still, the irresponsible little coot——

Absent-mindedly, Corl stooped and retrieved the packages Gaffney had dropped. He knew, almost without looking, what they contained—coffee and candy. Every time he went to town, Sugarfoot bought coffee—Corl drank tea and never touched coffee—and chocolate candy, which also was anathema to the big man. As he expected, one of the parcels contained two pounds of coffee in a cloth bag, and a box of candy. The other parcel was heavy and seemed to slip around inside its paper container. Corl opened this latter gingerly, finally bringing to light a glittering red-and-yellow object, which rested heavily in the palm of his hand. It was a cat, a china cat, with lustrous, painted, yellow fur, and beautiful, red whiskers. Big, shiny, blue eyes stared with an effect of pop-eyed whimsicality from beneath glossy green eyebrows.

Corl vaguely recalled having seen similar objects in his youth, adorning old-fashioned mantelpieces and what-nots; the only place one saw them nowadays was in old-furniture stores or secondhand shops. Corl turned the useless object this way and that, and swore softly. It was just like Sugarfoot, he told himself, to bring home something like this. Last time he had gone to town he had returned with a rubber snake. When compressed in the hand and abruptly let loose, the vivid-colored, rubber reptile assumed a disturbing semblance to a real snake. During the weeks that followed, Sugarfoot had succeeded in startling every visitor to the cabin. Jokes of this sort were meat and drink to Sugarfoot Gaffney.

An amazingly happy individual was Sugarfoot, a willing worker, too. In his spare moments he was forever singing, accompanying himself upon some one of the various instruments with which the cabin was littered, or dancing. This latter was really his forte. A dancing fool was Sugarfoot Gaffney. It was because of his gifts along these latter lines that the nick-name Sugarfoot had replaced his given name of Joe. An habitually silent, morose man, Hob Corl experienced a certain vicarious pleasure in his little partner's amusing accomplishments.

First, last, and always, Hob Corl's chief interest in life centered about the valuable claim near the little cabin, which, although not by any chance a bonanza, was proving rich beyond his fondest dreams. This little claim assumed an importance in the big man's estimation far in excess of its real value, due to the fact that it had been discovered more or less by accident. He and Gaffney were, by vocation, trappers. The Rodemich Hills still contained many fine furs; during the winter the partners were trappers; during the summer they worked their little claim.

The curiously unmatched pair had been partners for something over five years. Early in their partnership, Corl had discovered that Sugarfoot Gaffney could not be trusted with a dollar in his pockets. Hence, with the little man's agreement, their furs had been registered and disposed of in Corl's name; their claim had also been registered in Corl's name.

Sugarfoot Gaffney had at no time objected to this arrangement; in fact, he had subscribed most heartily to it. Once or twice only during their partnership had Gaffney been intrusted with an errand of any importance; in both of these cases he had failed miserably. And now—this—to-day, was the third time. There was close to five thousand dollars in dust cached in the partners' little cabin. The hills were overrun with bandits who had succeeded in crossing the border from Canada. The two men had received

many visits from these unsavory neighbors, but, due particularly to Corl's reputation as a terrible fighter, there had never been trouble.

Corl fully realized the potential menace represented by these unpleasant neighbors, and when notification was received that the last payment on their previous winter's fur catch, amounting to some two thousand dollars, awaited them at Black River, Corl had decided that the lesser of two evils would be to send Gaffney to town for the money, rather than leave the little man in charge of the cabin, while he went to town. Although the trip to Black River and back could easily have been accomplished in a day and a half, Sugarfoot had taken three days. Long before the little man had appeared, Corl had been assured, somehow, of the outcome. Sugarfoot had probably gone on to Helena by train and there had quickly got rid of the two thousand dollars.

Hob Corl slumped dejectedly on a backless chair beside the table in the little cabin. His first burst of rage was gone, leaving him thoroughly miserable. He had often threatened Sugarfoot with just such treatment as he had accorded the little man to-day. Each time Sugarfoot had assured him that he would submit to a manhandling once, and once only. Hob Corl knew that Sugarfoot had meant just that. The little man was spunky, and, despite his many weaknesses, was not readily bullied. The chances were, therefore, that Sugarfoot Gaffney was gone—for good. So also were the two thousand dollars. The fact that some five thousand dollars in dust, half of which belonged by right to Gaffney, was in his possession, and legitimately so, did not in the slightest serve to relieve Corl's dejection.

In the final analysis, it was not money for money's sake that interested Hob Corl; it was the pleasure derived from seeing tangible results of his hard labor that was at the bottom of his interest in that little claim. At heart, Hob Corl was a kindly man. He thought a great deal of Sugarfoot Gaffney. Already he sincerely regretted having so completely lost his temper. Of course, that two thousand dollars really had belonged to him; they had secured a total of four thousand dollars for their previous year's catch. The first payment of two thousand dollars had gone to Gaffney, who had promptly deposited it in the hands of an oil-stock salesman.

In the days that followed, Hob Corl went about his usual duties as though nothing out of the usual had occurred. In reality, he was very unhappy. He missed Sugarfoot Gaffney more than he would admit, even to himself. That first day, he had thrown the coffee, the candy, and the china cat upon a pile of refuse beside the cabin. Next day he had carefully retrieved these articles, feeling, somehow, that Sugarfoot would come back. But Sugarfoot Gaffney did not come back. Discreet inquiry in town disclosed the fact that the little man had not been seen there.

As the days passed and the big man's lonesomeness grew, he took out the china cat, which, wrapped in a burlap bag, he had placed in the bottom of an old trunk, polished it with a cloth and placed it on a shelf in a corner of the cabin. The gaudily painted piece of cheap crockery somehow typified Sugarfoot Gaffney. Corl found a certain comfort sitting there alone in the cabin during the wet, autumn nights just in watching that unnatural, grinning image. It reflected Sugarfoot Gaffney's personality more accurately than any other one of the little man's various belongings which still cluttered the cabin.

With the coming of the first snows, Corl set his trap line as usual, threading the open ridges and the alder

swamps about the cabin. Not until he began working this trap line in the soft snows of early winter did he fully appreciate just how thickly populated the Rodemich Hills had become. Scarcely a day passed that he did not come upon strange tracks. Invariably, the makers of these tracks sought to avoid him. Upon those rare occasions when he came face to face with his furtive neighbors, he found them, without exception, to be hard-faced, disagreeable individuals. No one of them ever came near his cabin, however. Hob Corl knew the reason for this. He was reputed to be a bad man to cross. These neighbors of his were, many of them at any rate, crooks. All crooks were yellow. Hence, even though most of them undoubtedly knew that there was gold cached somewhere near by, no one of them had the nerve to try to get it.

Corl was not one to take unnecessary chances, however. At the first opportunity, he deposited the dust in the hands of the express agent at Black River, consigned to a bank in Helena.

Furs were prime this year, and by Christmas a small fortune in valuable pelts reposed in Hob Corl's cabin.

Naturally of an unsuspecting nature, it was some time before he guessed that he was being robbed. It was the disappearance of a curiously marked marten skin that finally convinced him. This skin was an odd one; two inverted V's, snow white, had distinguished the back of this particular marten. Corl had never seen one of those valuable little anmials so marked. Due to these unusual markings, the fur itself was not particularly valuable; still, from time to time he sought it out and looked it over curiously.

One day the fur was missing. Corl looked over the furs more carefully then, and discovered that several valuable skins were gone, among them four silver-fox pelts.

From that time on the big trapper bolted the cabin door by means of an ingenious device, invented by Sugarfoot Gaffney, each time he was away. He took to studying the various tracks which often passed and repassed his little cabin along the ridge trail which led toward Black River.

Although not particularly skilled at sign reading, Corl finally made a discovery which at first really grieved him, and then, as the theft of fur continued, filled him with a mighty rage.

Sugarfoot Gaffney had come back!

Corl found his first clew to this when investigating certain snowshoe tracks which had, during the better part of one whole day, followed his own. This had always been a trick of Gaffney's. A lazy little coot was Sugarfoot. Invariably, the little man had allowed his willing partner to break trail. And then, although it often stretched his short legs unduly, he would follow the big man's tracks. Sugarfoot always made his own snowshoes, though. Clever at things of this sort was Sugarfoot!

Once his suspicions were aroused, Corl had plenty of chance to confirm them. He found many tracks undoubtedly made by Sugarfoot Gaffney's snowshoes. Unskilled though he was in matters of this sort, the big man knew that he could not be mistaken. No two pairs of snowshoes are alike. Sugarfoot Gaffney's were radically different from all others. He even found a pair of his old partner's snowshoes in the cabin and compared them with the fresh tracks which so often passed and repassed his cabin. They matched perfectly.

As the days passed and his furs continued to disappear, Hob Corl's anger grew. Any regrets which he might have felt for his brusque treatment of his erstwhile partner vanished in the face of this evidence of the little man's sneaking dishonesty.

It wasn't altogether the fact that Sugarfoot Gaffney had turned thief that so angered the big man, either; it was the implication of unfairness directed toward himself that, each time he considered the matter, roused his anger to a white-hot rage. Hob Corl had never cheated any man. None knew this better than Sugarfoot. Half of the dust in the bank at Helena, half of everything in the cabin, belonged to Sugarfoot Gaffney. The little man knew that all he had to do was to ask for his share and it would be promptly forthcoming. If he was hard up, down and out perhaps, there was no necessity for him to steal.

Whatever respect Corl might have felt for his genial, little partner, vanished in the face of the latter's actions. He was never abroad without his rifle. He did not follow Sugarfoot Gaffney's tracks, but he was always on the lookout for that slim, stooped body. Just one glimpse, and a leaden slug would put an end to Sugarfoot Gaffney's thieving once and for all.

One day in midwinter Corl started away early in the morning for Black River, the principal object of his journey being to secure tobacco. Sugarfoot had usually attended to keeping the cabin supplied with the necessities of life. The big man had been without tobacco for over a week, and, although he disliked to leave the cabin unguarded, his craving for a smoke finally urged him to make the trip.

When he had covered no more than a couple of miles of his projected journey, however, he paused in mid-stride and swore softly under his breath. He had just recalled that Sugarfoot's tobacco, a different brand than his own, was in a moisture-proof tin in an old brass-bound trunk beneath the little man's bunk. Corl had not touched this trunk since Sugarfoot had left. Hence the tobacco must be there, and a goodly supply of it, at that.

Although this tobacco would not satisfy him as his own brand would, it would be better than nothing. Corl decided to smoke Sugarfoot's tobacco. Therefore, there was no necessity for going to town. He turned right about and started briskly back toward the cabin.

Coming out upon a hilltop a quarter of a mile from the cabin, he made out a fur-clad shape scuttling through the alder swamp toward the cabin. Even at this distance he recognized Sugarfoot Gaffney's stooped figure. As he went, the little man peered this way and that, furtively, like the thief he undoubtedly was.

Muttering, Hob Corl dodged behind a snow-covered boulder and watched. He saw the little man deftly pick the lock on the cabin door and disappear within. Then, his face gray with rage, gripping his rifle tightly, Hob Corl started toward the cabin, and Sugarfoot Gaffney.

Drawing near the substantial little log building, Corl approached cautiously, dodging from clump to clump of the snow-covered spruces that surrounded the little building. At last, breathing hard with suppressed rage, he crept about the wall of the cabin, and, gun in hand, pushed the door inward. Sugarfoot Gaffney crouched on the floor, his thin face alight, inspecting a thick bundle of furs. For an instant, Hob Corl's mighty rage combated his speech. Then he spoke:

"Gotcha, you thief!" he snarled.

Sugarfoot Gaffney looked up, an expression like a cornered rat on his pinched face. He swallowed hard. The color left his face at what he saw in the big man's eyes. He came slowly to his feet, hands half raised above his head, and backed away. "Don't shoot, Hob," he begged. "You'll regret it. I—I——"

Hob Corl's face twitched, his finger tightened noticeably on the trigger of

the gun. The rifle's black muzzle unwaveringly indicated Sugarfoot Gaffney's heart.

"Don't shoot, Hob, fer pity's sake! Listen t' me, this time—just for a minute. Just a minute, Hob——"

Still the big man said no word, but the message contained in his glaring eyes told Sugarfoot Gaffney that his prayers had fallen on deaf ears. The little man stood back against the wall now; his thin fingers clenched and unclenched spasmodically; his thin lips twitched. But his dark eyes showed no fear of the almost certain death that faced him. Instead, there was a hopeless, pleading look in his white face. Directly above the little man's upstretched right hand sat the grinning, china cat. Just for an instant, Sugarfoot Gaffney's trembling fingers touched its polished surface, and then, even as Hob Corl's heavy face set into hard, purposeful lines preparatory to pulling the trigger, Sugarfoot Gaffney's outstretched fingers brushed the china cat off the shelf. Then, yelling, he sprang aside, as the gun in Corl's hand roared. The bullet tore through and through the log wall directly behind that spot where Sugarfoot Gaffney's heart had been an instant before. The little man dropped to the floor. His white lips spoke:

"You, you danged fool, Hob, listen to me a minute! Listen—listen—looka here!"

The little man thrust a finger toward the broken remains of the china cat. Hob Corl, his rifle seeking anew its objective, pointed downward with deadly intensity.

Even as he found Sugarfoot Gaffney's crouching body over the rifle barrel, the big man's eyes involuntarily followed Gaffney's outstretched finger, and what he saw there among the broken remains of the china cat caused him to lower the rifle altogether. A gusty sigh issued from his bearded lips. There on the floor was a plump roll of yellow-backed bank notes.

"It—it's all there, Hob," the little man explained, speaking swiftly, nervously. "Two thousand dollars, Hob! You wouldn't let me explain. But it's all there, Hob, every dollar of it. You see, I knew you didn't really trust me. You never did trust me. Figured I'd have a little fun with you. Bought that china cat and stuck the money inside."

Sugarfoot Gaffney brushed his white face with the back of his hand and came slowly to his feet.

"And now for this fur thief, Hob. I've been watching him for days. I know who he is. He thinks you're in town right now, like I did. He'll be along directly. Shut that door, and we'll bag him."

Like one in a dream, Hob Corl did as he was bidden.

Then for minutes which seemed hours, to Hob Corl at least, the two men crouched in the half darkness, waiting. Corl was breathing hard. His big body trembled from head to foot. From time to time his gaze traveled to that plump roll of bills on the floor, then turned to the still form of Sugarfoot Gaffney, who sat, calmly, at his side. "Heck!" he muttered. "And I nearly killed you, Sugarfoot."

Sugarfoot Gaffney, quite his old self now, grinned expansively. "Fergit it," he whispered, "and shut your trap. We're expecting a visitor, you know."

But Hob Corl continued to tremble, and when the crunch of snowshoes sounded just outside the cabin, he sat there like a man in a trance, seemingly unable to move. With a wondering glance at his companion, Gaffney gently took the rifle from the big man's hand and tiptoed toward the door. An instant later it swung inward. A black-whiskered face appeared, squinting into the dimness. A rifle, held rigidly in two hands, swept the inside of the

cabin. The thief glimpsed Hob Corl's huddled body. The rifle jerked upward, spat fire, roared! But the shot thudded harmlessly into the floor, as the rifle wielded club-fashion by Sugarfoot Gaffney landed with crushing force atop the thief's head.

Not until the fur thief had been disarmed, bound hand and foot, and stretched out upon the bunk, did Hob Corl recover his self-possession.

"I'm sure terrible sorry, Sugarfoot," he said. "I learned my lesson, I'm tellin' you! I'll never get sore at you again, Sugarfoot—as long—as long—as we're partners. And I hope that that there is goin' to be a long time. What say, Sugarfoot? Will you shake hands?"

Hairy hand outstretched, Hob Corl crossed the room toward Gaffney. The little man stood, hands in his pockets, watching the big fellow's stumbling approach. Suddenly, a gun appeared in Gaffney's right hand. It was a small, stub-barreled, shiny pistol. Hob Corl stopped in his tracks. The little man leaned forward.

"I can't believe you," he snarled. "There's only one way to make sure. *And this—is—the way.*"

He tapped the gun meaningly with his free hand, then lifted it until it unerringly pointed between Hob Corl's eyes. The big man gasped as he saw Sugarfoot Gaffney's slim fingers tug at the trigger. The next instant a stream of water belched out of the barrel of the little nickel-plated gun. The stream struck Corl fairly between the eyes, drenching his face with icy spray. He stumbled backward and even as he pawed at his eyes with the back of his hand, Sugarfoot Gaffney's shrill laughter came to him. And then Hob Corl laughed, too.

"Just like you, you danged little coot," he rumbled. "Might have knowed you'd pull suthin' like that." He reached forward, suddenly, and caught the little man in his arms in a breath-taking bear hug.

AN OLD-TIME BILL OF FARE

AT a recent banquet of the Colorado Mining Association, beans, bacon, sourdough bread, and canned tomatoes were served on a rough board table. The old-timers may smile at the idea of such a "banquet," yet how often have not these very viands seemed to some of them, coming on a cache of them after long wanderings in the desert, a very food for the gods. After all, hunger is the best sauce!

President Coolidge was invited to the dinner and his invitation was engraved on a block of solid gold. The executive would thus have been able, had he attended the dinner, to see not only the means which enabled the prospectors to keep going, but the golden lure which animated and led them on.

The Round-Up

WHY is it that men are so all-fired fond of dogs and horses?

Well, there's a lot of reasons, but a couple of 'em are that dogs and horses don't go pesterin' a feller with a bunch of embarrassin' questions, and also, dogs and horses love a man for what he *is*.

A feller's going off some place. Jest goin' to look 'em over, maybe. Kind of feels restless, let's say. What's to do?

He calls his two dogs over, and he says to 'em: "Here, you two, stick around till I come back, will you? Keep an eye on things. Don't let nobody run off with nothin'. No, you can't come along this time." They each gets a couple of pats. They both look kind of sad, seein' they can't come with you. But they stay. And they don't say nothin'.

Out in the barn you go. There is the bay mare. She's jest cleaned up a good feed. You give her a rub off. On goes the saddle and bridle. You don't have to bother about no gas, tires, engines, starters, roads, nothin'. Jest point her the way you want to go. And that way she goes, and goes willin'.

You come back when you like. Are them two dogs glad to see you! Boy! Do them two dogs ask you what you been a-doin'? Nit and no. Do them two dogs and the bay mare care what you wear, how you're dressed? No, sir! Do they like you any better in new clothes, or old? Do they care whether you got up late and forgot to shave? No, sir! Do they care if you wear suspenders or a belt? Do they care if your face and hands is dirty or clean? No, sir, they kiss you jest as hearty. And they don't go and ask you a lot of questions about where you was, and what you did while you were there. No, you don't never have to lie to a dog nor a horse, for they don't put any of those, what the law calls incriminating cross-exams, up to you.

Yes, you can look a horse or a dog in the eye, always. You can say: "Your old man he's been a awful fool, that's what he's been, and pickin's is goin' to be light for a while. You see, he went and got broke, he did." The dogs, they wags their tails an' seem to tell you, all right, don't worry none; and the bay mare, she just nickers when you chuck her in two quarts, instead of four.

Yes, dogs and horses, they jest love

you for what you are, and not for how you look. They see inside of you, they do. And they stick. And they forgive afore they're asked forgiveness, they do. Do they care if you're an old funny face and got bent-out legs? No. Your face and shape don't count one wag of a tail nor a shake of a head to them. They jest love you, they do, and no questions asked, not one.

Tie your dog up in a box stall and go have fun all day. What does that dog do when you come home and turn him loose? Chew your leg off, like any man or woman would if you treated him or her like that? No. Your dog, he jest gives you the grandest welcome, music and all, that a town's favorite son ever got.

"You see, dogs or horses, they jest love you, they do, and that's why a man, he jest loves them back. And a man, he'd sure be an ingrate, he'd be, if he didn't—now wouldn't he? Sure he would.

Then a dog sure admires you so, he does. Thinks you're the finest man as ever was. Would he so much as turn his head, would your dog, to look at a prince, a king, or a president? Guess not, save to sniff, turn up his nose at 'em, and trot along at your heels.

Say, if you ever get kind of low in your mind, get to thinkin' as how you don't amount to much, jest go to the back door and call your dog. He'll tell you you're *there,* that there ain't nobody in the hull county, no, nor in the hull world, that's good enough to lick your feet, 'cept him. And it's only 'cause he loves you so, that this honor can be his.

That's why men love dogs. Those are some of the reasons. There's lots more.

"Here, Tip, come over here by your old man. That's right. Lie down alongside of him. We'll rest here and let the folks finish up this here meetin' to suit theirselves."

"DEAR BOSS AND FOLKS: My name is L. Northfleet Galliland, Albuquerque. The boss has said it about dogs. And now, may I say just a few words? In my opinion, the story, 'Montana Rides,' by Cherry Wilson, is the best story I have ever read in the Western fiction, or any other fiction, field, and I have been reading WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE steadily for four years. May this note serve as hearty congratulations to Cherry Wilson."

Tip, we guess we'll have to introduce these fellers. Mustn't lie down on the job. Here is "Missouri" Tim, folks. Speak up, any of you as is handy with the bull whip:

"BOSS AND FOLKS: I have been a reader of your magazine for some time, and I don't know how I would spend my spare time without it. So, if you don't mind, I would like to say a few words.

"I was born and raised in Missouri and later I spent some time in Oklahoma.

"A couple of weeks ago, one of the boys here brought up the subject of bull whips. So far, I have seen no answer in the Round-up. I am not an expert with them, myself, but I know a little about them.

"I have a twelve-foot bull whip, a six-foot whip, and an eighteen-foot stage whip. I can hit a cigarette stump at least once out of three throws; cut a twelve-inch piece of paper held by two boys; stop a person running without cutting them, and hit them without hurting them.

"This boy wanted information as to the best kind of whip.

"I hope some old-timer will give us some dope on same.

"Three cheers and a whoop for WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE."

Hark ye to this; here is some more about Case:

"BOSS AND ALL: I just bought my first copy of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE, and as I am quite a hand to read Western stories, I wish to say that of all the stories that I ever read in novel form, I do not think any can compare with the story that you published in the March 24th issue, entitled 'When Weapons Failed.' I think this is the best Western story that I have ever read, and I read plenty. At first, I did not think I would like it, but as I got a little more through the pages—oh, boy! I will have to get WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE every week, from now on. And tell Mr. Robert Ormond Case to come often with stories like 'When Weapons Failed.'"

Herald R. Sarine, Box 262, Walden, New York, he's the gent as hands you that! Make your little bow, Bobbie.

Something will now be said about our authors by William F. Harrison, Calhoun Falls, North Carolina. Mr. Harrison, take the saddle:

"BOSS OF THE ROUND-UP AND FOLKS: I dropped in among you all for just a spell to say a word or two for WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE. Now, for 'big, clean stories of outdoor life' it just can't be beat, nowhere. Just let anybody that wants to contradict me read it, and in a month they'll agree with me.

"Now I want to brag some about your authors. I'm just crazy about William Patterson White's serial, 'Cloudy in the West.' Tell him he can't write another to beat it. And 'Riders of the Grande Ronde' is another whopper.

"And what is the matter with W. C. Tuttle? Tell him to come to the front, please. And there's Max Brand and Ray Humphreys. Tell Ray not to quit 'Shorty' McKay for nothing. Well, that's a long-enough chat. Guess I'll drift. Be back later."

Say, Pat White, don't you go and get all set up now! Here's a lady, Mrs. James A. Isaac, 624 Cedar Street, Pendleton, Oregon, who is going to say some more nice things about you. Jest you listen here:

"BOSS AND FOLKS: "I am hoping you will, or have, published in book form some of the serials that are in WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE. Two are especially good and worthy of cloth binding. The first, 'Cloudy in the West,' by William Patterson White, started as a serial in the September 3, 1927, issue, is the best Western serial I have ever read, and I certainly would like to add it to my bookshelves. The second, 'Riders of the Grande Ronde,' by Robert Ormond Case, started as a serial in WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE for January 28, 1928. Having been born and lived all my life in Pendleton, the 'Round-up' city, I will say that this is the best rodeo story I have ever read. It describes the round-up in every detail; only the town is changed from Pendleton to Grande Ronde Valley."

Miss Helen Rivers, who conducts this department, will see to it that you will be able to make friends with other readers, though thousands of miles may separate you. It must be understood that Miss Rivers will undertake to exchange letters only between men and men, boys and boys, women and women, girls and girls. Letters will be forwarded direct when correspondents so wish; otherwise they will be answered here. Be sure to inclose forwarding postage when sending letters through The Hollow Tree.

IN the days when the old mail stage rattled over the mountain trail, it was good to get a letter. The old mail stage is still rattling over the mountain trail that leads to Forest Glen, Trinity County, California, and it is still good to get a letter.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: Not many of you know what it's like to be way up in the mountains where the only diversion is the mail stage twice a week. Let me tell you-all—it's good to get a letter!

Perhaps Forest Glen appeals to you as the little retreat you'd like to spend the rest of your life in, or perhaps it doesn't. Perhaps you'd care to "stop over" for a visit, and perhaps you wouldn't. But, anyway, folks, you'd like to have a picture of it in your mind, and say "howdy" to some of us who call this little glen our home.

Every letter will be welcome, and here is one member of the Gang who will do her best to please. Remember, folks, up here in the mountains—it's good to get a letter!

MRS. BLANCHE A. HOELLING.
Forest Glen, Trinity County, California.

Stock raising in Texas.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I don't suppose you-all know that there are thousands and thousands of acres of cut-over land that's free range, or can be leased free for as long as five years at a time, in eastern Texas. Now, folks, I'm looking for a partner to go into stock raising in eastern Texas with me, and hope that some of you folks who've had a hand in ranching some time or other, will get in touch with me.

I'll be glad to answer any questions about eastern Texas. Cattle and sheep do well, as the climate is mild, and poultry raising is good here. Most kind of crops of fruits do well here, too.

J. M. WAGSTAFF.
Box 682, Smithville, Texas.

Lumberjack.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I hope a lumberjack will be welcomed into your Gang. I'm not an old woodsman—just twenty, but know something about the life of the woodsman. Maybe you think that because I can handle the heavier tools of the forest that I'll not be very quick with the pen, but you'd be surprised. I think Miss Rivers will tell you that I can spread the ink on the paper in a fashion that proves I'm used to letter writing. Come on everybody—from far and near.

C. L. DUFFIE.
Box 211, Wheeler, Oregon.

This Gangster knows the logging camps of the South.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I've spent twenty-two of my forty-seven years in logging camps here in Mississippi, Louisiana, and Arkansas. Any one who wants to know about log-

ging in any of these States, just write and I'll yarn aplenty, pronto.

Now, folks, I'd "perticular" like to hear from some of the fellers from up North, those who can tell me something about hunting and trapping up that way. I'd like to find me a pard who'd like to hunt and trap with an old logger. V. H. LAVENDER.

Box A-58, Route 2, Utica, Mississippi.

Arizonan.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: If any one wants to know about southern Arizona or New Mexico, here's his chance. I've lived in the southern sections of both States. The country and its history are worth hearing about, to say the least, and the old cow-punchers and pioneers around here certainly can tell some fine yarns of the early West.

I'd like to hear from hombres who are interested in exchanging snapshots, but I'll guarantee an answer to all letters within a week. I'd prefer to hear from hombres who rae under twenty-five.

JAMES T. O'NEIL.

Box 1101, Clifton, Arizona.

Let's help locate these homeseekers, folks.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: There are four men in our family—three grown boys and father, and we want to get a homestead in some place where we can spread out and in time acquire enough land so that we can each have our own homestead independent of father's. We'd like to find a place, if possible, close to a saw mill, so that some of us could get work for a few months out of the year. I suppose that homesteads located near big timber are hard to find, but perhaps some of you folks will know of such a section in Oregon. Good hunting and trapping would be an advantage, of course.

Let's hear from you fellows who've proved up on just such a homestead as we have in mind. A. A. MARCAURELE.

Box 92, Skellytown, Texas.

The home of the Chippewas.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I am living on the White Earth Reservation, the home of the Chippewa Indians, in northwestern Minnesota. Yes, I've been here some time—about twelve years, so I can tell a good bit about our red brothers. While the blanket Indian of olden times have disappeared, there is still much left on the reservation to interest those who have a desire to know about Indian customs.

This reservation has more than its share of Minnesota's famous ten thousand lakes. Fishing, hunting, and trapping here are of the best. A few minutes' drive in several directions from here will bring you into a regular wilderness of trees and streams.

It's only a short number of years since this reservation was opened up for settlement, and homeseekers would do well to investigate the opportunities that await them in this part of the country. Both timber and prairie land can be acquired here with very little outlay.

The name of this village, Waubun, is a Chippewa word, and the nearest English interpretation of it is "Rising Sun."

LARRY ANDREW.

Waubun, Minnesota.

Homestead seeker.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I would like to have some of your Western folks put me next to some good places to homestead. I'd like to locate where it's not too cold for stock and where I could grow hay. Would like to be where there is plenty of game, too.

E. R. PETERS.

Utleyville, Colorado.

"Any one wearing the little old friendship badge of The Holla will find a welcome at our door," says Mrs. F. S. Preston, 308 East Marshall Avenue, Ferndale, Michigan.

The Hollow Tree friendship badge is an open sesame everywhere.

Twenty-five cents in coin or stamps sent to The Hollow Tree Department, Western Story Magazine, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City, will bring you either the pin style or the button for the coat lapel. In ordering, be sure to state which you wish.

This Gangster wants a pard.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I am what they call a lightning artist. I paint as many as forty pictures a day. Now, folks, I'm a poor hand at handling a car, and I'd like to find a pard, over twenty-five, who would like to travel in a car on a fifty-fifty basis, and both work.

Let's hear from you young fellers between twenty-five and thirty-five. I'll sure answer

your letters even if we can't all hit it off as pards. RALPH FITZPATRICK.

35 South Perry Street, Dayton, Ohio.

The Cornhusker Gangster drops a letter into the old Holla.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: Here is a little poem that's meant to stir up some of the timid folks who sit and listen, but don't quite muster up the courage to write.

Write a Letter

Howdy do? Dear Gangsters, howdy do?
To those of you who've written,
I'm glad to've heard from you.
When the days seem long and dreary,
When life at best seems weary,
Write a letter!

CORNHUSKER GANGSTER.

Care of The Tree.

"Here comes a tenderfoot from New England seeking information regarding the raising of German police pups. I own several, and want to give them the best care and training," says Information Seeker, care of the Tree. This Gangster is looking for Pen Pals as well as for information, so don't pass him by, folks.

Planning Western trip.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: My parents and I are planning to tour from Ohio to Texas in a kind of house on wheels, converted from a ton truck. We want to go through New and Old Mexico, and as we know nothing of the time of year to make such a trip, or of the routes, conditions of roads, et cetera, we'd like very much to hear from any and all who can give us information.

It would also be fun to stop and say "Howdy" to some of the Gangsters along the way. GRACE MARIE YARBROUGH.

1041 West Eighth Street, Cincinnati, Ohio.

Minnesotan.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I usually spend my summer vacations out in the wide-open spaces, and this summer I want very much to see Texas, and to be on a ranch. I plan to work my way down there, and would like to earn "nothing and found" on a ranch somewhere and enjoy a month's work in the open. My husband was a good rider.

Let me hear from you pronto, please, you Southern Gangsters. If I do not go to Texas, I would like to choose another Southern State.

MRS. B. K.

Box 54, Coleraine, Minnesota.

"I'm right where Arkansas ends and Texas begins, folks—I'm on the border line, but still I'm a Texan. I've been over eighteen States, including Arizona, and there's something to tell about each and every one. I'm looking for an opportunity to mail a few long and friendly letters from Texarkana." This Gangster is Mrs. Beatrice Francis, 1219 Spruce Street, Texarkana, Texas.

"Two years ago I came to New York State from Hot Springs, South Dakota, where I was born. I'd like to hear from a lot of South Dakota girls who are in their teens, and also from Oklahoma. Is there any one living near Albion? If so, let me hear from you muy pronto." This Gang Sister is Bessie Hill, Box 218, Mayfield, New York.

"I've always longed to see the West and the great Northwest," says Mrs. I. A. S., care of the Tree. "The States that have interested me most are California, Texas, Arizona, New Mexico, Washington, and Oregon. Alaska and Canada have also come in for a great deal of my attention. I know that this is a large order, Gangsters, but I'd like to hear from you-all of the above-mentioned places."

"Would like information concerning Arizona," says Lawrence E. Dennis, R. F. D. 9, Zanesville, Ohio. He has written to six Arizona Gangsters and has received no answer. The Owl requests Gangsters to notify the Tree about Gangsters who fail to answer their letters.

WHERE TO GO AND HOW TO GET THERE

by John North

It is our aim in this department to be of genuine practical help and service to those who wish to make use of it. Don't hesitate to write to us and give us the opportunity of assisting you to the best of our ability.

Address all communications to John North, care of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

JUST as soon as we've finished discussing the latest gold strike another find pops up somewhere and we have to begin all over again. The following letter from Wayne L., of Springfield, Massachusetts, takes us along a brand-new trail that leads right up into the Canadian wilds. "I'd like to know something about the recent gold boom up in Nova Scotia, Mr. North," says he. "Just where is this new find located? How extensive is it? What is being done? How does one reach the diggings?"

The scene of this twentieth-century gold boom is Kemptville, Nova Scotia. The new diggings are situated in the heart of a country hitherto chiefly known to vacationists who wanted to get away from civilization into the wilds, where they could enjoy the beautiful scenery and fish in the many lakes and streams of the region. Some time ago, however, geologists marked this district on their maps as being especially rich in yellow metal. As Wayne probably knows, the Province of Nova Scotia is highly mineralized, with rock formations known to contain all sorts of deposits, especially lead, zinc, and gold.

Gold and lead have both been discovered in Kemptville and in such large quantities that extensive mining operations are already in full swing. There is always plenty of adventure in a gold rush whether it be to California or the Klondike, and the present case is no exception. And according to the scientific opinions of officials in Canada's bureau of mines, Kemptville offers the miner a sporting chance, with high stakes and favorable odds. Of course, there are many hardships to be encountered, as the miners who established their camp in midwinter, away off in a veritable wilderness many miles from the nearest habitation, found out. The first job was to cut a road three miles through the forest from the nearest highway,

over which lumber and machinery were later dragged on sledges by horses and oxen. The roadway, much of which is corduroy, is far too rough for automobiles, so that the only way to get there is by foot or horseback.

It's quite a jump from Nova Scotia to New Mexico, but our next query carries us journeying to the Sunshine State, for Roger M., of Washington, D. C., is looking not for gold dust but for a golden climate to cure his failing health. "For the past several years I have been suffering from rheumatism, Mr. North," writes he, "and I have been advised to try the baths at Hot Springs, New Mexico. What can you tell me about this place? Where is it located? What about the climate? What recreation is available? If I liked the section, what possibilities would it offer me as a permanent settler? I shall greatly appreciate all the information you can give me as I realize that I must soon make a move."

Hot Springs, New Mexico, is located in the valley of the Rio Grande, four miles below the famous Elephant Butte Dam on the main highway and about midway between El Paso, Texas, and Albuquerque, New Mexico. The altitude is four thousand two hundred feet. The winters are mild, snow seldom falling, and the sun shines three hundred and fifty days in the year. The wonderfully curative waters were known to the redskins, who passed yarns of their miraculous properties on to the pioneers. To-day healthseekers trek to the resort from far and near.

For recreation, Roger would have the Elephant Butte Dam and Lake B. M. Hall on the Rio Grande. Motor boating on the lake and bass fishing are fine sports. The anglers of the section report that bass weighing eight pounds are frequently caught, and as they are of the fighting variety, there are thrills aplenty for the fisherman. In season, quail, dove, duck, and goose hunting are popular pastimes. And if Roger has a desire to shoot big game, deer, bear, wolf, and panther can be found twenty miles west in the hills.

Should Roger decide to settle permanently in the vicinity he will be well located to look the country over, for Hot Springs is the northern gateway to the Rio Grande Valley. Here you enter that productive part of the valley where alfalfa, corn, wheat, cotton, and all kinds of fruits and vegetables grow abundantly. Adjacent to Hot Springs are the famous Black Range Mountains, rich in mineral deposits of many varieties, much of which are yet undeveloped. And the broad mesas bordering this fertile plain form one of the greatest cattle-breeding sections of the Southwest.

By the way, that part of Uncle Sam's domain seems to be growing more popular every day. Nor can we much blame folks for making tracks out that way where the climate is so good and the sun shines most all the time. Jake S., of Minneapolis, Minnesota, is craving some information about the Apache State. "I am planning to move out to Arizona some time soon, Mr. North, and I've been told that Chandler and its community offer much to the settler. What do you know about this town and its vicinity? Is the climate as good as it is supposed to be? What about the farming opportunities? What is grown? I'm not one of these chaps with an itching foot, but I surely am searching for a real opportunity."

Now, of course, I can't say whether Jake would find the opportunity he's looking for in Chandler or not, but he well might. This town is located in the heart of the great Salt River Valley, where the land is irrigated by water from the Roosevelt Project. This Arizona town is surrounded by the largest acreage developed and coming into development, of irrigable lands of any one incorporated city in the Southwest.

I don't know what Jake has heard about its climate, but I'll say it's pure and dry and said to be a foe to disease. A lot of folks who can not stand the cold, damp, and foggy sections of the United States enjoy good health in the Salt River Valley. Yes, the farming opportunities are mighty fine, what with deep, rich soil, a twelve months' growing season, an abundance of water, and low-priced land. The country gentleman who wants from one to ten acres, or the practical general farmer who wants from forty to one hundred and sixty acres, will find it equally easy to get the sort of place that will satisfy his desires.

So many crops can be grown that I fear when I list them Jake will think he's reading an agricultural report. To start, the mild winters make it possible to rotate crops throughout the whole year, while the warm summer months are of great value in the growth and early maturity of seasonal crops. Dairying is a safe, sure industry, because there is all-year pasture as well as top prices for products. Alfalfa yields six cuttings of one ton or more per acre. All varieties of vegetables are raised on Chandler farms, and it would be hard to beat the Pima cotton which thrives here.

This region is also particularly well suited to the raising of certain fruits. The oranges and grapefruits of the valley are famous for their rare flavor. Early grapes bring big prices on the Eastern market. Dates are prolific producers, as are lettuce, melons, figs, and in fact everything that flourishes in a semitropical climate. Altogether, Chandler and its vicinity has much to offer the homeseeker.

SLED DOGS TO THE RESCUE

RECENTLY two women were lost on the wind-swept wastes of a fifty-mile portage between the Kiskowim and Yukon Rivers. The women, who are residents of Holy Cross, Alaska, are now most enthusiastic over the intelligence displayed by the lead dog of their team of Huskies. Soon after crossing the Kiskowim River the pair lost their trail on the unmarked portage. But after wandering helplessly over the uninhabited and treacherous wastes for a time, they ceased trying to drive and left their fate to the dogs.

Not knowing where they were being taken, for several days and nights the women faced northerly winds and low temperature until the Huskies brought them safely into a little settlement.

MISSING

This department conducted in duplicate in DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE and WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE, thus giving readers double service, is offered free of charge to our readers. Its purpose is to aid them in getting in touch with persons of whom they have lost track.

While it will be better to use your name in the notice, we will print your request "blind" if you prefer. In sending "blind" notices, you must, of course, give us your right name and address, so that we can forward promptly any letters that may come for you. We reserve the right to reject any notice that seems to us unsuitable. Because "copy" for a magazine must go to the printer long in advance of publication, don't expect to see your notice till a considerable time after you send it.

If it can be avoided, please do not send us a "General Delivery" post-office address, for experience has proved that those persons who are not specific as to address often have mail that we send them returned to us marked "not found." It would be well, also, to notify us of any change in your address.

Now, readers, help those whose friends or relatives are missing, as you would like to be helped if you were in a similar position.

WARNING.—Do not forward money to any one who sends you a letter or telegram, asking for money "to get home," et cetera, until you are absolutely certain that the author of such telegram or letter is the person you are seeking.

POLLARD, JOHNNIE.—Last heard from in New York City. Information appreciated by his mother, Mrs. Cecile Davis, 353 Manassas Street, Mobile, Alabama.

COLEMAN, CURLEE.—Information appreciated by C. M., care of this magazine.

COLLINS, JOSEPH W.—Formerly of 39 Ziegler Street, Boston, Massachusetts. Last heard from in St. Nazaire, France, in February, 1919. Information appreciated by William E. Buttrick, 975 Inca Street, Denver, Colorado.

LARSEN, PETER NICOLS.—Last heard from in St. Louis, Missouri, in fall of 1925. Information appreciated by Niels Larsen, 1116 High Street, Des Moines, Iowa.

PREACHER.—Was not able to put this ad in the December issue. Please write to Charlie, Box 312, Mission, Texas.

L. I. E.—Who advertised for G. L. E. We are holding letters for you at this office. Please send your correct address.

BUNN, MYRTLE HELEN.—Answered your ad but letter returned. Yearning for you. Please send correct address to mother, care of this magazine.

DAVEY, ANNIE.—Formerly of 1 Bleecker Street and 229 East Tenth Street, New York. Your son who was placed in an orphans' home is anxious to hear from you. Please write to John Davey, care of Henry Coffe, South Plattsburg, New York.

CHILTON, DOCTOR JESSE A.—Was a dentist in Colorado and Utah in 1926-27. Information appreciated by C. H., care of this magazine.

McCLAIN, SARAH and EDNA.—Father and mother died in Fort Smith, Arkansas. Mother's name was Lucy. Please write to your lonely sister, Mrs. Rosie McClain Whiteley, care U. S. Zinc Co., Amarillo, Texas.

HOFFMAN, HENRY.—About forty-eight years old. Lived with his father, August Hoffman, in Lincoln, Nebraska, in 1889. Important news for him. Please write to George C. Brown, 340 Sunset Avenue, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

DAVIS, MARY.—Lived at 131A Street, Oxnard, California, in 1924. Moved to Monrovia, California. Please write to your old neighbor, Mrs. Ellouse Leedy, care Bates Ranch, Anderson, California.

McLACHLAN, COLIN R.—Formerly of the 181st Battalion, Canadian army. Twenty-seven years old. Last heard from in Minneapolis, Minnesota, in July, 1927. Information appreciated by his uncle, George E. Morrison, 1901 Lyndale Avenue, South, Minneapolis, Minnesota.

SMITH, ELMER ORA.—Twenty-seven years old. Last heard from in Wyoming. Mother ill. Please write to your aunt, Mary M. Martin, Route 3, Box 37, LaJunta, Colorado.

STONE, FLOYD R.—Of Humeston, Iowa. Please write to your daughter, Maxine, 166 Douglas Street, St. Paul, Minnesota.

AUDREY and BONNIE.—Mother settled everything. All charges dropped. Please come home. Fred, care of this magazine.

PULLIN, FLORENCE.—Seventeen years old. Last heard from in Shreveport, Louisiana, twelve years ago. Information appreciated by your father, Floyd Pullin, 2509 Canal Street, Houston, Texas.

H. N. B. or BOBBY.—Please write to your mother who longs to hear from you. J. R. B., Madawaska, Ontario, Canada.

KLEINHEIM, or CLINEHANCE, JOHN.—Was a musician in the U. S. Infantry in New Orleans and Baton Rouge, Louisiana, in 1873. Information appreciated by his daughter, Mrs. J. H. Krimmer, R. R. 3, Box 18, Jacksonville, Arkansas.

WINTERS, CLOYD EARL.—Please write to your worried mother, Mrs. J. W. Winters, Lyons, Oregon.

FOX, or FERRIS, WESLEY ALLEN.—Has a scar on left thumb. Last heard from in July, 1921, when he was on the U. S. S. "Hamilton," at San Diego, California. Have news to your advantage. Please write to Mrs. Mildred Koch, R. R. 1, Box 31, Hamburg, Michigan.

EDWARDS, HARRY.—Fought a forest fire near La Moine, California, in the summer of 1927. Please write to your friend "Oswald" who was with you at that time. My letter to you returned. Mark William Petersen, U. S. Naval Training Station, Company C-6, San Diego, California.

DAVIS, MRS. MAYME, nee **RUSSELL.**—Last heard from in Purice, Missouri. Has a sixteen-year-old son named Ranford. Have news for you. Please write to your sister-in-law, Mrs. Janie Davis, 594 Poplar Street, Memphis, Tennessee.

METZ, GEORGE, and MRS. JEWELL L. BROWN.—Last heard from in Milford, Texas. Information appreciated by Mrs. B. L. Stalcup, Box 34, Mill Creek, Oklahoma.

PHILLIPS, STANLEY F.—Last heard from in Troy, New York, in 1924, when he was living at 319 River Street. Has a sister named Ruth. Please write to your old sweetheart, who still loves you. Have moved. T. E. H., 5020 Pennsylvania Avenue, Detroit, Michigan.

FRAIN, ALFRED.—An automobile painter. Last heard from in Detroit, Michigan. Information appreciated by his wife, Mrs. Paula Frain, East Pensacola Heights, Pensacola, Florida.

PEARSON, POLLARD.—Last heard from twenty-five years ago at Globe, Arizona. Had a brother named Ben. Information appreciated by his niece, Mrs. Pearl Pearson McNeely, Box 72, Stringtown, Oklahoma.

ALICE.—Please write. Your mail is safe with me. Norman S., 722 Howard Avenue, Pottsville, Pennsylvania.

CARL.—Received a letter from your mother. Will forward it to you. Please write to her. In the meantime I will try to take your place. Please write to me at once and send your address. H. M. T., of Kansas City, Missouri, care of this magazine.

ATTENBOROUGH, DAISY N.—Lived in Rocky Hill and Hartford, Connecticut, in 1925-26. Was employed at one time at the Belmore Silk Mills, in Dividend, Connecticut. Information appreciated by Tom S., care of this magazine.

HEYWOOD, JAMES, or **DICK MURRAY.**—Am working alone now. My letters to you returned. Have news for you. Please write to George D., care of this magazine.

JERNIGAN, LURTON.—Eighteen years old. Last seen in Louisville, Kentucky, on June 22, 1926, when his uncle put him on a train for Portland, Tennessee. A blond. An amateur cartoonist and sign painter. Has a tubercular knot just below the left kneecap, which at times causes lameness in the left knee. Information appreciated by his anxious parents, William B. Jernigan, Portland, Tennessee.

OWEN, TIGE, and ED. MARTIN.—Last heard from near Kiowa, Oklahoma, in 1904. Please write to Mrs. Mary Owen, Route 3, Bonham, Texas.

GARBER, JOHN A.—Information appreciated by his daughter, Mrs. Margaret Ruth Barnacle, R. R. 1, White Bear Lake, Minnesota.

RICE, JEROME and JOHN ROTH.—Information concerning them appreciated by Mrs. Margaret Ruth Barnacle, R. R. 1, White Bear Lake, Minnesota.

STYMIEST, WILLIAM U.—Last heard from in Osoino, Idaho. Father and sister, Stella, are anxious to hear from you. Please write to Mrs. T. B. Shaw, Newton Center, Massachusetts.

JUSTICE, WILLIAM.—Last heard from in Ohio. Information appreciated by Mrs. Walter Marsh, care of this magazine.

TRAINER, MRS. JOHN E., nee **ELSIE SOUTHWORTH.**—Last heard from in Toledo, Ohio, in 1908. Information appreciated by her sister, Mrs. Edna May Southworth Whitmore, R. F. D. 3, Alto, Michigan.

ADA D.—Received all your cards and answered them, but my letters were returned. Everything is O. K. Please write to your dad and sister and send your address. Sister Lena, 32 Matilda Street, Toronto, Ontario, Canada.

GREENWAY, GEORGE or **HENRY.**—About forty-five years old. Last heard from in Ellinwood, Kansas. Information appreciated by John J. DeThample, Box 114, Chase, Kansas.

KRAUZER, ANNA.—Last heard from in Fallsburgh, New York, and at 489 Broome Street, New York City. Mother ill. Please write to Mrs. Anna Grudziasn, Box 317, Seymour, Connecticut.

SPENCE, MRS. GERTRUDE HELEN.—Thirty-six years old. Has three daughters. Moved from Malta, Illinois, to Lovells, Michigan, twenty years ago. Her husband is a painter. Last heard from eight years ago. Information appreciated by her brother, James H. Doss, R. 1, Shawneetown, Illinois.

BILLY.—Last heard from in Montreal, Quebec, Canada. Am home and have the baby with me. Please write and let me know where you are. Dot, care of this magazine.

BAIL, MARION E., nee **EVELYN WILLIAMS.**—I still love you. Phone me if you are still in Chi. Pros. 9052 or write to Mel, care of this magazine.

POCKOWISKI, or **PELLET, JOE.**—Last heard from in Goldfield, Nevada, in January, 1924. Please write to your old pal that went West with you. Mitch, 154 Ridge Road, Lackawanna, New York.

DAVIS, EVA or **CLEVA.**—Do you remember the sailor on the U. S. S. "Oklahoma," on the night of the dance, July 5, 1926? Am at a foreign station now. Please write to Eddie, care of this magazine.

LINDBERG, AXEL.—About forty-five years old. Last heard from in Nehalem Valley. Information appreciated by his daughter, Elvira Lindberg, 80 East Jessup Street, Portland, Oregon.

SHADID, PHILIP.—About twenty-eight years old. Last heard from in El Paso, Texas. Information appreciated by his sister, Sadie Mattar, care of this magazine.

SNOVER, GRACE.—Information concerning her or her relatives appreciated by her daughter, Mrs. Mildred Leona Hays, 6733 Kelly Street, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

DOUBEK, IDA.—Last heard from in 1913, in Calmar, Iowa. Information concerning her appreciated by her cousin, Frank Humpal, 3257 Snelling Avenue, Minneapolis, Minnesota.

MacKNEALEY, MRS. ELLEN, nee **COLDWELL.**—Last heard from in Coffeeville, Kansas, twenty years ago. Information appreciated by her sister, Mrs. Effie Owens, Baxter Springs, Kansas.

CONRAD, JOHN F.—Blue eyes and brown hair. Weighs about two hundred pounds. I need you. Please come home or write to your wife, Ola Conrad, 426 East Tenth Street, San Angelo, Texas.

KEELEY, CLARENCE H.—Any one who knew him at the Great Lakes Naval Station, Camp Boone, and saw him have a hemorrhage outside of the Knights of Columbus barracks, about eight o'clock on the evening of October 10 or 12, 1918, please write to Clarence H. Keeley, 14306 Victory Boulevard, Van Nuys, California.

McCLELLAND, WILLIAM JAMES.—Last heard from in Mexia, Texas, about seven years ago. Was a road builder. Information appreciated by his daughter, Mrs. Charles T. Jackson, 709 Henley Street, Houston, Texas.

GRANT, MARCEL, and family.—Formerly of Vallejo, California. Left for Quebec in 1919. Information appreciated by L. H. Amey, La Porte, Plumas County, California.

SEED, MONROE H.—Last heard from in Ogden, Utah, in February, 1926. Information appreciated by his anxious parents. Mrs. James A. Seed, Box 52, St. Croix Falls, Wisconsin.

ASHTON, SAMUEL and **WILLIAM.**—Formerly of Yorkshire, England. Last heard from in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, about thirty-five years ago. Relatives from England are anxious to hear from the children of these brothers. Mrs. G. H. Cooper, Box 1088, Pittsfield, Massachusetts.

DERIES FAMILY.—Formerly of New York. The youngest of the family, a girl, was adopted when a baby. Other members of the family or any one knowing them please write to X. Y. Z., care of this magazine.

TWIGGS, C. C. and **ALBERT A.**—Last heard from in Dillon, Montana, in January, 1925. Have news for them. Joe H. Twiggs, 322 Seventh Avenue, North, Seattle, Washington.

VINAS, CLARY.—Nineteen years old. Last heard from in Medford, Oregon. Please write to Joe H. Twiggs, 322 Seventh Avenue, North, Seattle, Washington.

SMITH, CHARLES L.—Formerly of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Last heard from in Wellsburg, West Virginia. Information appreciated by his old sweetheart, Pearl Thompson, 203 Twenty-first Street, Bellaire, Ohio.

LYDIATE, JOHN.—Twenty-nine years old. An ex-Canadian soldier. Last heard from while working for the Pacific Electric Railway, in Los Angeles, during the summer of 1923. Information appreciated by his sister, Mrs. Elizabeth McNamee Freud, 2721 West Ramona Boulevard, Alhambra, California.

PETIT, GEORGE EARL.—Last heard from in Albuquerque, New Mexico, in 1907. Information appreciated by his sister, Goldie, Mrs. Alvin H. Smith, Harlowton, Montana.

FRANK.—Do you remember our wild days on the Mexican border? Please write to your old side kick, Harvey, care of this magazine.

SWEET, MRS. MARY, nee **HAWKINS.**—I love you. Have reformed. Please give me another chance. S. J. Perry, care of this magazine.

HARBOUGH, CHARLES E.—Forty years old. A restaurant and barbecue man. Believed to be in Ohio or Illinois. We need you. Please write to M. H., care of this magazine.

ORTION, GRACE.—Last heard from at 705 Ashland Avenue, Chicago, Illinois. Information appreciated by A. O. Ortion, Box 488, Texon, Texas.

GARSAVAGE, AGNES.—Last heard from in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Information appreciated by F. J. S., care of this magazine.

COPELAND, WILLIAM F.—Fifty-one years old. Last heard from in Goldfield, Nevada, in 1911. Information appreciated by his brother, David Copeland, Seminole, Oklahoma.

VOYER, RAY.—Thirty-eight years old. Left his home in Atlanta, Michigan, about twenty-three years ago. Dark eyes and hair. Information appreciated by his sister, Mrs. Laura Tallman, 1300 North Jefferson Street, Bay City, Michigan.

GRAHAM, LETHA.—Twenty years old. Last heard from in Jonesboro, Arkansas, in April, 1924. Was going to Bono, Arkansas, or St. Louis, Missouri. Information appreciated by James M. Todd, Box 838, The Infantry School, Fort Benning, Georgia.

GATES, LOUISE.—Eighteen years old. Last heard from in San Francisco, California, in June, 1926, when she was staying at the Dale Tallac Hotel. Information appreciated by James M. Todd, Box 838, The Infantry School, Fort Benning, Georgia.

PAULSEN, ANDRE.—Twenty-seven years old. French descent. Last heard from in Areata, California, in 1926, when she was in the employ of a lumberman in Samoa, California. Have important news for you. Please write to James M. Todd, Box 838, The Infantry School, Fort Benning, Georgia.

SHERLOCK, McNALLY, or **GILE, OLLIE.**—Twenty-three years old. A blonde from Kentucky. Believed to be in Illinois. Information appreciated by her father, David C. Gile, 152 South Burdick Street, Kalamazoo, Michigan.

WOODS, JOHNNIE or **SHORTY.**—Last heard from in Boston, Massachusetts. He is a boxer and goes under the fighting name of "Sailor Woods." Was fighting in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, in 1926. Information appreciated by an old friend, Clarence Hill, 117 North Grand Avenue, Los Angeles, California.

HIGGINBOTTOM, SAM.—Last heard from in Philadelphia, fourteen years ago. Information appreciated by his sister, Eva, care of this magazine.

HOLLAND, THOMAS.—Has lived in Oregon and in New York City. Last heard from in Waupun, Wisconsin, in 1921. If you can prove your identity important news awaits you due to the death of a cousin. Please write to Peter Holland, 2 St. David's Terrace, N. C., Road, Dublin, Ireland.

DELAP, TOM.—Last heard from in Gainesville, Texas, phia, fourteen years ago. Information appreciated by his cousin, William E. Wingert, Box 190, Gainesville, Texas.

HOLMSTROM, CHARLES W.—Last heard from at Camp Bennings, Georgia, in 1922. Information appreciated by his sister, Mrs. M. J. Reynolds, New York Mills, Minnesota.

IVESTER, THELMA or **CECIL.**—Last heard from in Tampa, Florida, in April, 1927. Information appreciated by Mrs. Carrie Martinle, Royal Oak, Michigan.

BAILEY, JOHN, RACHEL, and MARTHA WRIGHT.—Born in Scotland. Last heard from in Joliet, Illinois, in 1900. Information appreciated by their cousin, Mrs. Martha Wright Sneddon, 2 Somerleyton Road, Brixton, London, S. W. 9, England.

H. S.—Your mother is helping you, so please let us know where you are. Will have to give up soon, as I am not able to work. Shirley cries for you. Betty, care of this magazine.

RHIEL, HENRY.—About thirty-three years ago he married Myrtle Merriman, who died leaving a daughter. Moved with his mother and brother, Charlie, to Idaho. Information concerning any of this family appreciated by Mrs. Rex Joseph, R. F. D. 1, Wichita, Kansas.

RABON, HENRY.—Thirty-eight years old. Last heard from in Evergreen, Alabama, in 1921. Information concerning him appreciated by his half brother, Claude A. Rabon, care of this magazine.

HEWSTON, JAMES.—Last heard from in California. Has two daughters, Kathleen and Cecelia. Please write to your sister, Mrs. Kathleen Shank, 178 Jackson Avenue, Jersey City, New Jersey.

HOWELL, EUGENE.—Last heard from in Virginia, when he was in the navy. Information appreciated by E., care of this magazine.

WEBB, LEONARD.—Formerly of Nelsonville, Ohio. Please write to Guy L. Pickett, 6110 Kimbark Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

ANDERSON, CHARLES A.—Left Carthage, Missouri, in 1883. Please write to your only daughter, who is a widow with a nine-year-old son. Mrs. Pearl Gibson, R. 11, Box 132, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

NOTICE.—Am desirous of locating a German gentleman who roomed with me at the Point Pleasant Hotel, Hamilton, Bermuda, in the fall of 1911, and also the elderly gentleman, who was about eighty years old at that time, who recommended that I read "Looking Backward." Any who were at this hotel at this time please write to G. N. Garrison, 45 Oak Street, East Orange, New Jersey.

TOBIA.—Received your letter. Please send your address and tell me why you left. Your letters are safe with me. L. and boys are home. All well. Aunt M., care of this magazine.

MAIDA, TOM.—Thirty-nine years old. A tinsmith. Has scar of a horseshoe on side of his head. Last heard from when living at 65 Forsythe Street, New York City, in 1925. Information appreciated by his brother, Joe Maida, 1064 Sixty-fourth Street, Brooklyn, New York.

BIGGS, RUBY.—Last heard from in Anaheim, California. A teacher. Information appreciated by Harry Seger, Route A, Box 104, Orosi, California.

SCHEVE, JOSEPH A.—Twenty-three years old. Last heard from in Spokane, Washington, in 1926. Information appreciated by his brother, C. Scheve, 2534 Burling Street, Chicago, Illinois.

BOLEY, or CRUZAN, EVERETT LLOYD.—Twenty-six years old. Adopted by people in Red Fork, Oklahoma. Information appreciated by his sister, Mamie St. Peters, 1048 North First Street, Ponca City, Oklahoma.

BROWN, JESSIE.—A French-Canadian. Thirty-eight years old. Last heard from when living at 161 Efner Street, Buffalo, New York. Information appreciated by Arloesn Benjamin, Bolivar, New York.

MYERS, LEONARD.—Last heard from when living at 161 Efner Street, Buffalo, New York. Information appreciated by Arloesn Benjamin, Bolivar, New York.

G. E. M.—Everything is O. K. Please come home or write to Marge, care of this magazine.

LIPPI, LEDEMO.—Was discharged from the Marine Base, San Diego, in 1925. Last heard from at Apartment 7, 911 Grove Street, Oakland, California. Please write to your pal, Elizabeth, Mrs. A. C. Beaman, Glenview, Apartment 54, 330 South Flower Street, Los Angeles, California.

BEAMAN, CHARLES I.—Last heard from in San Diego. Information appreciated by his cousin, Betty, Glenview, Apartment 54, 330 South Flower Street, Los Angeles, California.

ATKINS, MARION LOUISE.—About sixteen years old. After her mother's death her father, Ernest A. Atkins, took her away from Portland, Maine. Information appreciated by her aunt, Mrs. Bertha Stone, R. F. D. 2, Box 49, Surry, Maine.

BOWERS, BOB.—Please write to G. M., Box 426, Flagstaff, Arizona.

END, EDWIN.—Last heard from in Susanville, California, in October, 1927. Please write to your mother, Mrs. End, Vernonia, Oregon.

RICHARDSON, MADISON.—An architect and prospector. Lived in Carson City and Virginia City, Nevada, in 1885 or 1890. Believed to be dead. Information appreciated by his brother, L. B. Richardson, Box 383, Ellwood City, Pennsylvania.

AVERY, MRS. LAURA, FAULKNER, MERRILL, ARTHUR, and SELMA.—My mother, brothers, and sister. Last heard from in Mitchell, South Dakota, in 1921. Information appreciated by Frank Avery, Ajo, Arizona.

TOWNSEND, C. V.—Last heard from in Chicago. I miss you and your letters. Please write to L. B. Manzinelli, care of this magazine.

HACKER, LEWIS.—About sixty-four years old. Last heard from in Minnesota seven years ago. Your letter was destroyed by fire before I could read it. Please write to your daughter, Mrs. Luetta Johnson, 2413 Jackson Street, Seattle, Washington.

MASON, CHARLES.—Served with the Canadian army in France during the World War. Last heard from at 237 Vaughan Street, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada, in March, 1920. Important information from England. Please write to your cousin, Mrs. Hannah Pillivant, 119 Meadle Street, Mount Clemens, Michigan.

LILLEY, ROBERT TODD.—Believed to be connected with the moving-picture laboratories. Information appreciated by Mother Lilley, care of this magazine.

HART, ABNER BLESS.—Twenty-three years old. Last heard from in New York City, in May, 1924. Information appreciated by his mother, Mrs. I. G. Hart, 2747 Clarence Street, Dallas, Texas.

DEWEESE, CHAUNCEY.—Frenchman. Last heard from in Denver, Colorado, Christmas, 1911. Information appreciated by Otto McLain, 118 West Josephine Street, San Antonio, Texas.

MADDOX, A.—All is forgiven and forgotten. Please come home or write to us. Your son, T. R. Maddox, General Delivery, Memphis, Tennessee.

TAYLOR, WILLIAM.—Fifty-five years old. Formerly of Covington, Ohio. Please write. Will keep communication confidential and will not tell where you are. Your son, William Taylor, Jr., care of this magazine.

KORN, FRANK, GEORGE, and LOUISE.—My brothers and sister, who were placed in an orphans' home in New York City after their mother's death and were later sent to an orphanage in Lincoln, Nebraska. They were both adopted from this home. Information concerning them appreciated by their brother, Thomas, care of Edward Popple, Box 1479, Casper, Wyoming.

WILSON, MRS. JULIA.—Formerly of New York City. My aunt was adopted by R. M. Reed. Heard from her once and would like to hear from her again or any of my relatives. Please write to Thomas Lawrence Korn, care of Edward Popple, Box 1479, Casper, Wyoming.

HANNAHAN, TOM and MATILDA.—My uncle and aunt. Lived at once time in New York City. Please write to your nephew, Thomas Lawrence Korn, care of Edward Popple, Box 1479, Casper, Wyoming.

NOTICE.—Would like to find my real parents. I was born January 4, 1912, in Akron, Ohio, and adopted by people named Herbert. Have brothers and sisters but do not know their names. Anxious to hear from any of my relatives. E. F. Miller, U. S. S. "Arizona," Box 1, San Pedro, California.

FARCHELB, or FISHER, CHARLES.—Formerly of Lowell and Springfield, Massachusetts, and Hartford, Connecticut. Last seen on pier in Boston going South. A World War veteran. Please write to Charles, of Quincy, Massachusetts, care of this magazine.

HORTON, THOMAS, BENJAMIN, and MARY JANE.—Ages sixty-five, sixty-three, and sixty-one, respectively. Were placed in a Catholic orphanage near New York City when small children. Information concerning them appreciated by their brother, John Horton, care of this magazine.

STANDIFORD, DAN.—Let us renew our friendship. Please write to Dora, care of this magazine.

BRUCE, WILLIAM LEE.—My father. Would like to hear from some of his relatives. He was the son of Sallie and Henry Bruce and was born near Savannah, Georgia. Please write to Gladys Bruce, Lafayette, Alabama.

HUCKS, A. J.—Sixty-five years old. A carpenter. Last heard from in Birmingham, Alabama. Information appreciated by his daughter, Mrs. W. R. Bullard, Lafayette, Alabama.

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